



November 10, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

On behalf of the National Retail Federation (NRF), I am writing you today to urge your support for the visa reform provisions included in the Fiscal Year 2012 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill (S. 1601), which is expected to be on the Senate floor today.

The bill includes important reforms to the U.S. visa system that will help improve the efficiency of the U.S. visa process for legitimate international visitors. Freeing up the visa process could bring in nearly 100 million more visitors a year, create more than one million new jobs and pump more than \$800 billion into the U.S. economy.

With rapidly growing economies creating a new breed of affluent shoppers in countries like Brazil, China and India, U.S. retailers have grown to highly value foreign tourists in recent years. Unfortunately, tourists from these countries face lengthy delays in obtaining a visa because of security requirements implemented after 9/11. These delays have led legitimate travelers to visit other countries instead of the U.S., resulting in a significant drop in the U.S. share of the international travel marketplace. NRF supports strong national security measures and does not advocate lower standards for entry. The State Department, however, needs to provide adequate personnel, technology and other resources so visa applications can be processed in a timely manner.

While the State Department currently has a goal of interviewing all visa applicants within thirty days of their application submission, it has failed to meet this performance standard in key markets. S. 1601 directs the State Department to hire enough consular officers to meet the thirty day standard, and requires State to develop a plan to meet demand for nonimmigrant visas in Brazil, China and India over the next five years.

As the world's largest retail trade association and the voice of retail worldwide, NRF represents retailers of all types and sizes, including chain restaurants and industry partners, from the United States and more than 45 countries abroad. Retailers operate more than 3.6 million U.S. establishments that support one in four U.S. jobs – 42 million working Americans. Contributing \$2.5 trillion to annual GDP, retail is a daily barometer for the nation's economy. NRF's [Retail Means Jobs](#) campaign emphasizes the economic importance of retail and encourages policymakers to support a [Jobs, Innovation and Consumer Value Agenda](#) aimed at boosting economic growth and job creation.

We believe that the proposed changes in S. 1601 will improve efficiency of the U.S. visa process for legitimate international visitors while at the same time maintaining – and in some cases increasing – security. We encourage you to support these provisions and the final passage of S. 1601 when it comes up for a vote on the Senate floor.

Sincerely,

David French
Senior Vice President
Government Relations