

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 3598

To require commercial airlines to provide cash reimbursements, and to authorize the Secretary of State to waive or reimburse travel expenses, for any United States citizen who is evacuated from a foreign country and repatriated to the United States due to travel restrictions implemented in response to COVID–19 or any future pandemic or international crisis.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 4, 2020

Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself, Mr. MARKEY, Ms. WARREN, Ms. HARRIS, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. HEINRICH, Mr. SANDERS, and Ms. CORTEZ MASTO) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To require commercial airlines to provide cash reimbursements, and to authorize the Secretary of State to waive or reimburse travel expenses, for any United States citizen who is evacuated from a foreign country and repatriated to the United States due to travel restrictions implemented in response to COVID–19 or any future pandemic or international crisis.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Repatriation Reim-
3 bursement Act”.

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS; SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

5 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
6 ings:

7 (1) The spread of the novel coronavirus (2019–
8 nCoV) and subsequent travel restrictions issued by
9 nations around the world have left many United
10 States citizens stranded overseas as they sought to
11 return to the United States.

12 (2) On March 19, 2020, the Department of
13 State issued a Level 4 Health Advisory that—

14 (A) advised all United States citizens to
15 avoid all international travel due to the global
16 impact of COVID–19;

17 (B) urged United States citizens overseas
18 to seek commercial departure options to return
19 to the United States unless they were prepared
20 to remain abroad for an indefinite period; and

21 (C) lead many United States citizens to
22 seek repatriation to the United States.

23 (3) As a result of rapidly changing travel re-
24 strictions by the United States and the closing of
25 borders and airports in numerous countries around
26 the world—

1 (A) many commercial airlines cancelled
2 flights and failed to reimburse United States
3 citizens for the costs they had paid for such
4 flights; and

5 (B) many United States citizens were left
6 without any return flight options.

7 (4) In their efforts to comply with the Depart-
8 ment of State travel guidance, some United States
9 citizens have been forced—

10 (A) to pay often exorbitant and unantici-
11 pated fees directly to commercial airlines for
12 emergency flights to return to the United
13 States; or

14 (B) to sign a promissory note to the De-
15 partment of State to commit to reimbursement
16 for a flight chartered by the repatriation task
17 force through United States embassies around
18 the world.

19 (b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—Given the precarious po-
20 sition of United States citizens who were stranded globally
21 and the difficult economic conditions they may face upon
22 returning to the United States, it is the sense of Congress
23 that the commercial airline industry and the Department
24 of State should fully reimburse or waive all travel costs

1 for United States citizens who require repatriation to the
2 United States as a result of the COVID–19 pandemic.

3 **SEC. 3. REIMBURSEMENT OF CERTAIN TRAVEL EXPENSES**
4 **BY COMMERCIAL AIRLINES.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—All travel expenses incurred, on
6 or after December 31, 2019, and on or before September
7 30, 2020, by any United States citizen as a direct result
8 of any flight on a commercial airline that is cancelled or
9 does not depart within 24 hours of its originally scheduled
10 departure time shall be reimbursed, in cash, by the airline
11 with which such flight was initially booked if the citizen
12 was evacuated from a foreign country and repatriated to
13 the United States due to travel restrictions implemented
14 in response to COVID–19.

15 (b) REQUIREMENT TO HONOR ORIGINAL TICKET
16 PRICE.—Notwithstanding any otherwise applicable con-
17 tractual provision, any commercial airline that sold a tick-
18 et to a United States citizen described in subsection (a)
19 for a flight from a foreign country to the United States
20 during the period set forth in such subsection that, due
21 to travel restrictions referred to in such subsection, was
22 cancelled (by the passenger or by the airline) or was re-
23 scheduled to depart more than 24 hours after its originally
24 scheduled departure time—

1 (1) shall provide the passenger with a cash re-
2 imburse of the total costs incurred by the passenger
3 for any cancelled flight;

4 (2) shall waive any change fees associated with
5 replacing such ticket for another flight;

6 (3) may not charge the passenger any more for
7 the replacement ticket than was charged for the
8 original ticket; and

9 (4) shall provide the passenger with a cash re-
10 imbursement for any amount paid by the passenger
11 during the period set forth in subsection (a) that is
12 prohibited under paragraph (2) or (3).

13 (c) FUNDING.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in para-
15 graph (2), a commercial airline may use amounts
16 appropriated or otherwise made available to the
17 commercial airline industry in any appropriations
18 Act enacted on or after March 1, 2020, in response
19 to COVID–19 to pay for the travel expenses de-
20 scribed in subsection (a).

21 (2) LIMITATION.—A commercial airline may
22 not use amounts appropriated under section 4112 of
23 the Coronavirus Economic Stabilization Act of 2020
24 (title IV of division A of Public Law 116–136) to

1 pay for the travel expenses described in subsection
2 (a).

3 **SEC. 4. EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION FOR UNITED**
4 **STATES CITIZENS EVACUATED FROM FOR-**
5 **EIGN COUNTRIES DUE TO COVID-19 TRAVEL**
6 **RESTRICTIONS.**

7 (a) WAIVER OR REIMBURSEMENT OF TRAVEL EX-
8 PENSES.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of State shall
10 waive any travel expenses paid by the Department of
11 State on or after December 31, 2019, for any
12 United States citizen who is evacuated from a for-
13 eign country and repatriated to the United States
14 due to travel restrictions implemented in response to
15 COVID-19 or any future pandemic or international
16 crisis, as determined by the Secretary.

17 (2) PROMISSORY NOTES.—Any promissory note
18 signed by a United States citizen to reimburse the
19 Department of State for travel expenses described in
20 paragraph (1) shall be null and void.

21 (3) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 4 of
22 the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956
23 (22 U.S.C. 2671) is amended by adding at the end
24 the following:

1 “(e) In the case of a communicable disease for which
2 the Federal Government has issued a travel alert or travel
3 warning, the reimbursement requirements under sub-
4 sections (b)(2)(A)(ii) and (d) shall not apply.”.

5 (4) REIMBURSEMENT.—

6 (A) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary of
7 State shall reimburse United States citizens
8 who were evacuated from a foreign country on
9 or after December 31, 2019, and repatriated to
10 the United States due to travel restrictions de-
11 scribed in paragraph (1) for travel expenses as-
12 sociated with such evacuation and repatriation,
13 including the costs of commercial or charter
14 flights and any ground transportation expenses
15 associated with travel to the foreign airport and
16 from the domestic airport to their homes in the
17 United States.

18 (B) PROCESS.—The Secretary of State
19 shall develop an online process through which
20 United States citizens may submit claims for
21 reimbursement for travel expenses described in
22 subparagraph (A).

23 (b) FUNDING.—The Secretary of State may use
24 amounts appropriated or otherwise made available to the
25 Department of State in any appropriations Act enacted

- 1 on or after March 1, 2020, in response to COVID–19 or
- 2 any future pandemic or international crisis to pay for the
- 3 travel expenses described in subsection (a).

