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June 17, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

For over sixteen months, families and loved ones in the United States and Canada have endured a long and painful separation in response to the public health crisis. Now that the crisis has subsided, I write you asking the United States to expand the definition of essential travel between our two countries and immediately accommodate a reciprocal family reunification policy.

Since June 2020, during the height of the pandemic, Canada has allowed for immediate family members defined as a spouse, partner, dependent child, dependent grandchild, parent, or stepparent to circumvent essential travel restrictions and reunite with their family in Canada. Last fall, in October 2020 the Government of Canada expanded this family reunification policy to extended family members of Canadian citizens and Canadian permanent residents – going so far as to include those in an exclusive dating relationship of over one year *and* their dependent children.

This humane family reunification policy has not been reciprocated by the United States. Fully vaccinated spouses, parents, grandparents, dependent children, grandchildren, boyfriends, and girlfriends in Canada are not allowed to simply drive across the US border and see their loved ones. They must instead exploit a loophole in current travel restrictions by booking an expensive flight, flying to the United States, and then traveling by car to their family or loved one. To border communities like Buffalo and Niagara Falls, where much of Canada is closer to our homes than other places in New York State, this policy lacks in common sense.

At present, over 60 percent of the adult populations of the United States and Canada have received at least one dose of the vaccine and millions more are fully vaccinated. As vaccination rates climb, case rates have plummeted. Implicit in these numbers is the concession that vaccines work and that vaccinated people should not be subjected to COVID related restrictions. Across the country, states and localities are dropping their pandemic-related restrictions and life is resuming. Once we change policy to adopt to this reality, the broader border closure and enduring family separations become indefensible.

As our countries approach our respective national holidays – July 4th Independence Day in the United States and July 1st Canada Day in Canada – we should endeavor to reopen our borders in celebration of our shared victory over the pandemic. We should reunite the families and loved ones who have sacrificed their precious time and memories together over the past year. Respectfully, I ask that you align the United States’ family reunification policy with Canada’s ahead of the expiration of this month’s border closure order.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress