

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 3, 2022

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

Dear President Biden,

We write to request, within all applicable rules and regulations, that you take all possible measures to reinstate regular consular services in Cuba as long as the concerns below are addressed. It is essential to take into account several important considerations when resuming regular consular services.

First, consistent with U.S. policy in furthering human rights and promoting democracy, we urge you to prioritize consular access for Cuba's brave human rights and pro-democracy activists, as well as those with urgent humanitarian or medical need. It was particularly insulting to many in our districts when regime operatives, and their favorites such as the professional baseball players, were able to access on-island consular services while the vast majority of more deserving Cubans were forced to travel to a third country at considerable expense. In fact, those least able to pay for travel and lodging abroad were required to do so. This is neither "equitable" nor consistent with our country's values. Accordingly, it is essential that the U.S. prioritize, for those seeking the special privilege of U.S. entry, those Cuban nationals who dare to demand freedom and human rights, and those with urgent, humanitarian or medical need. We would also suggest that you carefully vet applicants to ensure that no known human rights abusers are permitted the special privilege of entering the United States, and request to be kept informed of steps being taken to prioritize human rights and pro-democracy applicants.

Second, it is important that the processing of Cuban Family Reunification Parole (CFRP) program applications is resumed as expeditiously as possible. The CFRP program has been paused since the September 2018 staff drawdown which was initiated due to justifiable and troubling concerns regarding the health of U.S. personnel in Havana. Several of these applicants have already completed many steps in this program, and yet have had their applications on hold for years. For this reason, we introduced the bipartisan Cuban Family Reunification Modernization Act as an option to remedy these delays. This legislation authorizes the Department of State, in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense to resume processing of CFRP applications, including conducting in-person interviews at the U.S. Naval Station in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, unless another suitable location in the island may be found. This is a pressing issue for many in our community, and we believe that it should be among the first tasks accomplished with resumption of consular services. We would appreciate being kept informed of progress in the expeditious resumption of the CFRP program.

Third, the regime in Cuba has a long history of harassing U.S. personnel, intimidating Cuban nationals that attempt to meet with staff or access services, and interfering with regular diplomatic activity. Unfortunately, the custom has been that the regime provides a list of those who may be employed at the U.S. mission. This custom has been detrimental to the security of both the Americans who work there, and the Cuban nationals that seek consular services, internet access, or other assistance. In addition, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence established an IC Experts Panel on Anomalous Health Incidents (AHIs), or “Havana Syndrome,” which produced a report that was declassified on February 1, 2022. This panel reported that at least five plausible causes could explain these AHIs, suffered by about two dozen American personnel and their families in Cuba, and methods should be taken to detect and prevent them in the future. For these reasons, we urge you to consider carefully the manner in which security staff and other non-U.S. personnel are selected at the U.S. mission in Cuba, and request to be kept informed of steps being taken in the process of selecting non-U.S. personnel.

Additionally, we are concerned that Cuban nationals are stationed at the post in Washington, D.C. and suggest that you limit their number and monitor their activities closely. Cuban diplomat-spies have been expelled from the United States for espionage activities numerous times. For example, three Cuban diplomats were expelled in 1998 for espionage, another in 2000, fourteen in 2003, and three in 2005. Fifteen diplomats were expelled following the AHIs in 2017. In fact, as recently as 2019, two Cuban diplomats posted in New York were expelled for conducting “influence operations.” Accordingly, as you work to protect the security of Americans stationed in Havana, we also request that you protect key national security interests by ensuring that the Cuban nationals stationed at the missions in Washington, D.C. and New York are watched closely, and that their numbers are kept to a minimum. Years of espionage by diplomat-spies of the Cuban regime, a U.S.-designated state sponsor of terrorism, provide ample reason to take firm and proactive measures in curtailing their opportunities for malevolence.

Ensuring the safety of our brave U.S. personnel stationed in the island is paramount. Once your administration has deemed that it is safe to proceed with regular consular services in Cuba, we respectfully request that you take these other priorities and concerns into consideration, and keep us apprised of your progress.

We appreciate your attention to this matter of utmost importance.

Sincerely,

A stylized blue ink signature of Mario Diaz-Balart, featuring a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Carlos A. Gimenez, with a prominent, sweeping initial 'C' and a long horizontal stroke.

Carlos A. Gimenez
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of María Elvira Salazar, characterized by a series of connected loops and a long horizontal stroke.

María Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress