

Senator Warren, Massachusetts Delegation Urge Biden to Expedite Visa Process for Haitians

U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), along with the entire Massachusetts congressional delegation, sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Rena Bitter, urging them to expedite the processing of immigrant visas for Haitians – particularly for relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs). The request comes as Haiti has plunged further into chaos, with gangs reportedly uniting, ousting the country's prime minister, and coordinating attacks that some warn could spark a civil war.

“We write to express our increasing concern regarding consular operations at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti,” wrote the lawmakers. “We urge the State Department to expedite the processing of immigrant visas for Haitians, particularly for relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs).”

Haiti has already struggled with long-standing challenges that have contributed to the deterioration of its security situation, including one of the deadliest earthquakes in modern history, severe corruption, massive protests, and crippling debt. In 2021, the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse plunged the country into a state of unrest. As of 2023, the country has had no democratically elected government, and gangs now control an estimated 80 percent of the capital city. The local population faces skyrocketing rates of homicides, kidnappings, internal displacement, cholera, and starvation.

“As you recently highlighted, Haiti presents ‘one of the most urgent challenges we face as an international community.’ The situation in Haiti demands urgent, creative solutions to ensure that, at a minimum, relatives of U.S. persons can be quickly processed and reunited with their families in the United States,” wrote the lawmakers.

This crisis has led many individuals to seek asylum in the United States. Massachusetts has one of the largest Haitian diasporas in the country, and many Haitian-Americans are desperately trying to sponsor family members still in Haiti. Thousands of Haitian relatives of U.S. citizens and long-term permanent residents (LPRs) are in the processing queue for family-based immigrant visas. However, the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince – the U.S. government’s only post in the country – has been operating on an emergency-only basis due to the ongoing security crisis and has suspended or greatly delayed the processing of most visa services.

“The State Department must implement stop-gap solutions to more quickly process visas for Haitians in need of urgent protection, even as the U.S. Embassy maintains minimal operations in Haiti,” continued the lawmakers. “We appreciate the scale and complexity of this issue and applaud the work the State Department has already done to explore creative solutions to address the backlog. Still, we urge the State Department to ensure that solutions are implemented with the urgency that this issue demands.”

Specifically, the lawmakers are recommending the State Department implement the following policy and operational changes to visa processing in Haiti, including:

- Waive the personal, in-person appearance requirement, at least for Haitian immediate relatives of U.S. persons.
- Ramp up capacity for processing Haitian immigrant visas at a third-country post.
- Establishing a new location for in-person requirements

besides the U.S. embassy, given the particularly high level of unrest in the neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince and the threat posed to those who leave their homes.

– Senator Warren has led ongoing efforts to protect the rights of asylum seekers and other migrants, and to hold the United States accountable to its humanitarian obligations:

In February 2024, Senators Warren and Markey sent a letter to U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations Chair Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Vice Chair Susan Collins (R-Maine), urging them to increase funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Shelter and Services Program (SSP) to \$5 billion in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations bill for fiscal year 2024.

In February 2024, Senator Warren and colleagues submitted an amendment to the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024 that would provide \$5 billion for the FEMA's Shelter and Services Program without requiring U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to ramp up its detention and deportation efforts. Senator Warren worked with Senator Padilla and others to submit a similar amendment to the Fiscal Year 2024 Spending Package in March 2024.

In December 2023, Senator Warren, along with the entire Massachusetts delegation, wrote to FEMA raising concerns about a lack of federal funding for non-border states like Massachusetts experiencing a significant influx of migrants and requesting additional federal SSP funding for the Commonwealth.

In November 2023, Warren, Markey, Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.), Peter Welch (D-Vt.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) sent a letter to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director Ur Jaddou, about several policy proposals to help address delays in issuing employment authorization documents.

In September 2023, Senators Warren and Markey applauded the Biden administration's redesignation of TPS for Venezuelan migrants.

In August 2023, Senators Warren and Markey and Representatives Katherine Clark (D-Mass.), Lori Trahan (D-Mass.), Seth Moulton (D-Mass.), James McGovern (D-Mass.), Richard Neal (D-Mass.), Stephen Lynch (D-Mass.), Jake Auchincloss (D-Mass.), Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.), and Bill Keating (D-Mass.) sent a letter to Secretary Mayorkas and Director Jaddou, urging them to expedite the processing of EADs for individuals paroled into the United States, which would lessen the strain on available humanitarian and housing resources.

In March 2023, Senator Warren and lawmakers submitted a public comment against the Biden administration's proposed rule to restrict asylum at the southern border. The senators called on the Biden administration to withdraw the rule in its entirety.

In January 2023, Senator Warren and nearly 70 other lawmakers sent a letter urging President Biden to reverse the administration's expansion of the inhumane Trump-era border policy known as Title 42 and to abandon the proposed asylum "transit ban" rule. The lawmakers also encouraged the President and his administration to work with Congress to develop safe, humane, and orderly border policies that enforce our immigration laws and uphold the right to asylum under domestic and international law.

In September 2022, Senator Warren led members of the Massachusetts delegation in a letter to DHS and FEMA calling for funding from the Emergency Food and Shelter Program to be allocated swiftly to organizations assisting newly arrived migrants in Massachusetts.

In September 2022, Senator Warren released a statement condemning efforts to use asylum seekers as political pawns and committing to assisting communities in need.

In November 2021, Senator Warren stated her opposition to the

continued use of Title 42 to expel asylum seekers and called for the Biden administration to rescind this policy.

In October 2021, Senator Warren joined Senator Menendez in criticizing the inhumane treatment of Haitian migrants and called on the administration to support long-term stability in Haiti.

In October 2021, Senator Warren called on Chris Magnus to commit to transparency regarding the investigation into the events in Del Rio, Texas during his confirmation hearing to be CBP Commissioner.