

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 13, 2021

The Honorable Rebecca Kelly Slaughter  
Acting Chair  
Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Acting Chair Slaughter:

We write to express our concern regarding recent reports documenting an increase in travel scams that seek to exploit American consumers. We also write to request information on specific actions being taken by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to protect consumers as more of them receive a coronavirus vaccination and resume travel.

As vaccines become more widely available and travel restrictions are lifted, 67 percent of Americans plan to travel this summer.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, recent reports highlight an increase in incidents of scammers posing as travel or booking agents to book fraudulent vacation rentals and creating fraudulent airline websites to sell fake tickets.<sup>2</sup> We are concerned by these reports of consumers being targeted by scammers, particularly given the recent FTC report highlighting that consumers have lost nearly \$400 million to fraud since the start of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

The FTC plays a critical role in protecting consumers from unfair, deceptive, or fraudulent practices in the marketplace, including travel scams. While the FTC posts advisories pertaining to travel scams,<sup>4</sup> we believe that more must be done to protect consumers. Travel reservations made on fraudulent websites can be costly and stressful for travelers, and it is critical to ensure that Americans understand how to recognize travel scams and their recourse options should they fall victim to these scams.

We also respectfully request that you respond to the following questions:

1. What action has the FTC taken to date to coordinate with the Department of Justice, states, and private groups to educate consumers about travel scams and how to protect themselves?

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<sup>1</sup>Trip Advisor Travel Index. (2021, April 20). Travel is Heating Up: Two-Thirds of Americans Planning Summer Vacations. Retrieved from <https://ir.tripadvisor.com/news-releases/news-release-details/travel-heating-two-thirds-americans-planning-summer-vacations#:~:text=Over%20two%2Dthirds%20of%20Americans,of%20the%20generation%20planning%20trips>.

<sup>2</sup>Better Business Bureau (2021, April 23) BBB Scam Alert: Watch Out for Airfare Scams When Booking Your Next Trip. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbb.org/article/scams/20149-scam-alert-watch-out-for-airfare-scams-when-booking-your-trip>; Kolko, Robert (2021, April 27) Retrieved from <https://www.winknews.com/2021/04/27/as-americans-book-more-vacations-travel-scams-take-off/>; Better Business Bureau (2021, April 30) *BBB Scam Alert: Beware of Twist on Third Party Airline Ticket Booking Scam*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbb.org/article/scams/24106-bbb-warning-beware-of-twist-on-third-party-airline-ticket-booking-scam>; Nannestad, Chloe (2021, April 22). *Airbnb Scams: The 5 Most Common Ones and How to Avoid Them*. Retrieved from <https://www.rd.com/article/airbnb-scams/>; <https://www.bbb.org/globalassets/local-bbbs/council-113/media/scam-tracker/risk-report/2018-scamtracker-riskreport-03.04.19.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Federal Trade Commission (FTC). (2021, April 13). Protecting Consumers during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Year in Review. Retrieved from: [https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/protecting-consumers-during-covid-19-pandemic-year-review/covid\\_staff\\_report\\_final\\_419\\_0.pdf](https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/protecting-consumers-during-covid-19-pandemic-year-review/covid_staff_report_final_419_0.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>Federal Trade Commission (FTC). *Travel Scams*. Retrieved from <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0027-travel-scams>.

2. Is the FTC planning to take additional measures to better protect consumers and assist them should they become victim to a travel scam? If so, please describe these measures.
3. What data has the FTC collected regarding the incidence of travel scams since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic? Is the FTC providing this data to its law enforcement partners as part of its Consumer Sentinel Network?
4. Does the FTC need additional resources to better protect consumers from travel scams? If so, please describe these resource needs in detail.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



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Steve Daines  
United States Senator