



September 10, 2020

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cruz,

On behalf of the Dallas/Fort Worth and Austin chapters of PEN America, the writers' organization defending freedom of expression in the United States and around the world, we write to express concern about reports that the new CEO of U.S. Agency for Global Media, Michael Pack, is blocking the renewal of J-1 visas of foreign journalists employed by public international broadcasters overseen by the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), especially the Voice of America. We urge you explain to Mr. Pack why this is a bad idea and to relent.

The USAGM and its grantees employ foreign journalists to carry out the agency's mission to "inform, engage and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy." Foreign journalists are essential to this mission, bringing critical language skills and invaluable firsthand insights from around the world. Media organizations supported by the USAGM have made it clear that they rely on J-1 visas to recruit and retain these talented journalists and believe strongly that doing so furthers our country's position as a global leader in press freedom.

In addition, failure to renew these visas would put many of these journalists at great risk, forcing them to travel during a pandemic and, in some cases, sending them back to countries with a track record of hostility toward journalists. As a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we hope you will speak up and speak out on this issue.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Will Evans – PEN America Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter Leader  
Sanderia Faye – PEN America Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter Leader  
Chaitali Sen – PEN America Austin Chapter Leader  
Tim Staley – PEN America Austin Chapter Leader