

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, TEXAS
CHAIRMAN

BRENDAN P. SHIELDS
STAFF DIRECTOR



GREGORY W. MEEKS, NEW YORK
RANKING MEMBER

SOPHIA A. LAFARGUE
DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

One Hundred Eighteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

August 23, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

It recently came to my attention that the U.S. Department of State may be falling short of its fundamental responsibility of protecting Americans that reside or travel abroad, particularly in the Dominican Republic. I am concerned that your Department does not have a complete accounting of the number of Americans that are currently imprisoned in the country, which could impact our government's ability to offer assistance to Americans in need. I respectfully ask you to look into this issue and address it quickly.

As Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, my foremost priority is the safety and well-being of American citizens and legal permanent residents in other countries. Yet according to information this Committee has received, there appears to be a disconnect between the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo and the State Department headquarters in Washington regarding the number of Americans held in prison. This discrepancy could be delaying our assistance efforts like welfare checks, legal aid, family visitation, or worse, result in our fellow Americans to be abandoned.

Furthermore, families of some of the detained individuals have approached this Committee and the State Department seeking assistance and guidance during this distressing period. It is important to me that these families get the answers they need from their government, and nothing less.

You may also be aware of the serious criminal justice issues within the country as it relates to preventive detention, which can keep people locked in prison for years at a time and without charge. I appreciate that your Department has noted this long standing problem considering nearly 70 percent of prisoners in the Dominican Republic are there through a preventive

detention order, and not yet convicted. It's an endemic issue clearly impacting Dominicans, and very likely, Americans as well.

As such, I ask you to take immediate action and thoroughly investigate these cases and provide this Committee answers to the following questions no later than 5:00pm on Wednesday, September 6, 2023. Additionally, I urge you to engage with your counterparts in the Dominican Republic to ensure proper legal procedures are followed and that the detainees' rights are protected.

I look forward to your prompt response.

1. What is exact number of American citizens and legal permanent residents that are currently held in prison in the Dominican Republic?
2. How many of these people are held in prison under an order of preventive detention?
3. Of the Americans held on an order of preventive detention, how many have not been formally charged with a crime?
4. Has the Embassy conducted welfare checks and offered assistance to each of these Americans?
5. In compliance with the Privacy Act, will the U.S. State Department offer a report to this Committee on the case status for each of the Americans held in preventive detention?
6. Please provide the Committee with a breakdown of preventive detention programs funded by the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

Sincerely,



Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee