



A
PROJECT
OF



September 13, 2023

The Honorable Michael McCaul
U.S. House of Representatives
2300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative McCaul:

On behalf of the Dominican Justice Initiative—a project of the Hispanic Leadership Fund—I write to express our gratitude for your leadership regarding the protection of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents in the Dominican Republic. We especially appreciate your recent letter that seeks answers from the U.S. State Department on their responsibility to protect Americans negatively impacted by the Dominican Republic's broken criminal justice system. We appreciate your work to protect Americans, and we look forward to assisting your efforts in the future.

Your August 23rd letter raises an important question as to whether the State Department is doing enough to protect Americans in the Dominican Republic. You note that the Department may not have a full accounting of how Americans are imprisoned in the country or if all these individuals have received assistance from their government. By failing to accurately know the exact number of Americans imprisoned, our government may be abandoning some of our fellow Americans—a disturbing revelation that must be addressed.

Americans must have confidence that their government has their back when they are abroad. Thankfully, your leadership will hold this administration accountable to ensure all Americans get the help they need from their government. The protection of Americans abroad is a solemn and fundamental responsibility that I know you take seriously, and your letter on this topic is a testament to that commitment.

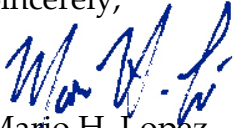
I completely agree with your assessment that the Dominican Republic's use of preventive detention is "endemic." DJI was founded to raise awareness to this exact issue due to it being widely ignored by Congress, human rights observers, and even lawmakers within the Dominican Republic.

You also rightly note that the Dominican Republic has “serious” criminal justice issues, particularly as it relates to the use of preventive detention. Almost 70 percent of all individuals in prison are there on a preventive basis—meaning people can be locked in jail without charge for months at a time. The practice is widely condemned for good reason: it tramples on human rights, due process, and helps entrench the power of the state.

We cannot allow our fellow Americans to be left behind, especially if they have not been charged. We applaud your efforts to highlight and correct this concerning situation, and rest assured that Americans trapped overseas also appreciate your leadership on this important issue.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if DJI can be of further assistance to you on this matter.

Sincerely,



Mario H. Lopez

Hispanic Leadership Fund / Dominican Justice Initiative