

State Department Proposes Visa Bond of Up to \$15,000 for Country Travelers

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The U.S. State Department is launching a one-year pilot program that will require certain business and tourist visa applicants to pay a bond of up to \$15,000 before being allowed entry into the country, aimed at reducing visa overstays and tightening immigration compliance for travelers from nations with historically high rates of noncompliance.

Set to begin this August 20, the program will apply to select applicants based on risk factors, including country of origin and the strength of that country's document and border control systems. The bond amount will range between \$5,000 and \$15,000, with the decision left to the discretion of consular officers evaluating individual cases.

Countries most likely to be affected include those with limited internal security infrastructure or elevated visa overstay rates, such as Chad, Haiti, Myanmar, Yemen, and Equatorial Guinea. Travelers from countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program, such as the United Kingdom, Japan, and most of Western Europe, will not be subject to the new rule.

According to the State Department, the bond will be refunded in full once the traveler departs the United States within the permitted timeframe. However, critics argue that the high upfront cost could discourage legitimate visitors, particularly families and small business travelers, from applying. Immigration advocates have also warned that the program may disproportionately affect low-income applicants from developing nations.

This bond proposal revives elements of a similar policy introduced during the Trump administration in 2020, which was never implemented following the Covid-19 pandemic. The current plan is part of broader efforts to strengthen visa enforcement. Other recent changes include enhanced background checks, stricter eligibility criteria for renewals, and increased scrutiny of applicants' social media history.

Supporters of the policy argue that financial accountability could serve as a strong deterrent against visa violations. They see the bond as a practical tool for ensuring compliance without permanently restricting access to the country.

Once the pilot program is in place, federal agencies will monitor outcomes to assess whether the bond requirement reduces overstay rates. Depending on the results, the policy could be extended or made permanent.