

FSM Information Services

Press Release

The 21st FSM Congress Removes President Panuelo's COVID-19 Travel Restrictions

PALIKIR, Pohnpei—On March 11th, 2020, the 21st Congress of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), through Congressional Resolution 21-129, removed the travel restrictions imposed by His Excellency David W. Panuelo, President of the FSM, on travelers originating from COVID-19 affected countries, states, and territories. The removal is effective immediately. Only travelers from Hubei Province of the People's Republic of China are still banned from travel to the FSM, and FSM citizens are only banned from traveling to Hubei Province. All other travel restrictions are lifted.

President Panuelo is unable to reinstate the travel restrictions without authorization of Congress if it is in session, or the Committee on Health & Social Affairs if it is not.

Additional measures taken by Congress include Congressional Resolution 21-127, hypothetically authorizing the President to access \$2,000,000 (two million dollars) of funding from the Disaster Assistance Emergency Fund (DAEF)—although under the Compact of Free Association, as Amended, only \$200,000 (two hundred thousand dollars) can be accessed per disaster. Further, Congressional Resolution 21-126 requests the President to urgently meet with private sector institutional lenders in the FSM to find ways to provide relief to borrowers.

Through Congressional Bill 21-168, \$1,000,000 (one million dollars) has been appropriated to finance a tourism industry mitigation fund, which will be managed by a four-person committee from the Departments of Finance & Administration, Resources & Development, Justice, and Environment, Climate Change, & Emergency Management. The committee is expected to issue detailed regulations for businesses and individuals to access the fund.

The Executive Branch intends to ensure fairness in accessibility of tourism industry mitigation funding, particularly as hotels across the Nation are owned by both private businesspeople as well as, in several cases, multiple Members of Congress. Further, the Executive Branch is aware that the economic impacts from travel restrictions in the FSM are not unique and that the entire global economy is being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the cancellation of major events, conferences, international travel, and the limiting of large public gatherings.

The Public Health Emergency Declaration has been extended until May 15th, 2020, inclusive of its altered format.

“I will continue to do everything in my power to protect the people of our Nation,” President Panuelo said in a statement. “Every single life in the FSM is important; every man, woman, and child deserve to live in a country that enthusiastically supports their rights to health, education, safety, and the capacity to pursue their own happiness.”

“For all the discussion about how travel bans don't work,” President Panuelo continued, “It is noteworthy that the FSM still doesn't have any cases of COVID-19. I continue to believe, based on the advice of the State and National COVID-19 Task Forces, the WHO, and the CDC, that travel restrictions are a crucial component of our Nation's strategy to defend its citizens, and I maintain that the removal of said travel restrictions is, at best, needlessly harmful, and at worst, cruel and

shortsighted, on the premise that preserving the sanctity of human life is part of the Government's responsibility. The travel restrictions aren't about a political power play, but about preserving the health and safety of our people. The lives of Micronesians is foremost, and should outweigh the short-term economic impacts that we are currently facing."

"I encourage all citizens to avoid large social events, to avoid touching their face, and to wash their hands before and after eating, before and after using the bathroom, and before and after working outside."

The FSM National Government strongly encourages all citizens to limit unnecessary travel.

With the travel restrictions lifted on a national level, individual FSM States are beginning to implement their own declarations of emergency. The Office of the President is aware of Pohnpei State's Constitutional Emergency Order No. 20-01 which requires "all incoming passengers on flights and vessels...[to] be quarantined at the Dekehtik isolation area for a mandatory 14 days." When the Office of the President inquired with the Pohnpei State Government's Public Information Office, the Office of the President was advised that the term "all incoming passengers" applies to international and domestic travelers, i.e. including FSM citizens from Chuuk, Yap, or Kosrae visiting Pohnpei.