April 13, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Mark A. Morgan  
Acting Commissioner  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Acting Commissioner Morgan,

I am writing to urge you to reinstate weather and safety leave for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations (OFO) officers at our ports of entry. It is critical that we protect the health and safety of our essential frontline workers during this global pandemic.

CBP officers have the responsibility of facilitating legitimate travel and trade at our nation’s borders. Due to that mission, officers are increasingly at risk for contracting COVID-19 and inadvertently transmitting it to their colleagues, families, and communities. The weather and safety leave was instituted to protect the health of the workforce by reducing staffing at ports and created the ability to properly social distance in accordance with Centers for Disease Control recommendations.

In my district, there are 4 ports of entry that allow for cross border trade and travel along the United States-Canada border. The recent agreement between the US and Canada to end non-essential travel has resulted in a significant decline in auto traffic across the border. In Western New York, there was reporting of declines as high as 93%. This reduction in travel should be mirrored with a reduction in staff. Rescinding the temporary leave puts officers back in the ports unnecessarily because there is no workflow to support that capacity.

These ports of entry are staffed by dedicated CBP officers who worked with their management to develop a temporary scheduling policy that maintained the integrity of the mission and ensured full operational capacity. The sudden decision to rescind this collaborative effort is a breach of trust and detrimental to the health and safety of such a critical workforce.
I urge you to rescind this decision and reinstate the weather and safety leave for CBP OFO officers. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress