

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

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

The Honorable Ian G. Brownlee  
Acting Assistant Secretary of State  
Bureau of Consular Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
600 19<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036

July 21, 2021

Dear Secretary Blinken and Acting Assistant Secretary Brownlee:

We respectfully request the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs take steps to address the severe passport processing delays affecting U.S. citizens both at home and abroad.

On March 19, 2020, the State Department paused the passport application process due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By June 2020, the Department was forced to recall essential employees to address a more than 1.8 million passport backlog, forcing applicants to delay their passport request or face severe processing delays.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, the Department has only fallen further behind as pandemic restrictions ease and more Americans feel comfortable traveling both domestically and internationally. This has created a surge of new passport applications in addition to the existing backlog.

On July 12, 2021, the Department released updated passport guidance warning new and existing applicants of severe delays for both routine and expedited services. Despite Consular Affairs efforts to process roughly 200,000 application per week over the past year, the Department's response has thus far been ineffective, leading to long wait times and cancelled travel plans.

Rather than taking steps to expedite processing times by making passport offices more accessible to applicants or returning more employees to in-person work, the Department is instead encouraging applicants to pay an additional fee for expedited processing. Perhaps most egregiously, those additional fees do not guarantee timely delivery of an applicant's passport, for which the Department seems to have faulted delays by the U.S. Postal Service. According to the Department's website, applicants are asked to wait up to 18 weeks for routine passport services or pay an additional \$60 per application for expedited services to reduce your wait time to 12

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<sup>1</sup> Dawn Gilbertson, "Need to apply for a passport or renew one? Coronavirus backlog could mean a long wait," *USA Today*, August 18, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/news/2020/08/18/us-passport-renewal-application-logjam-leads-long-processing-times/5392050002/>.

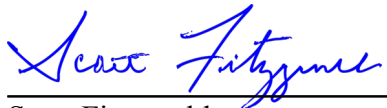
weeks.<sup>2</sup> Under normal operating capacity, these services would take between 6-8 weeks and 3 weeks, respectively.

To date, the Department's efforts to resolve this matter have been ineffective and are needlessly costing taxpayers additional money to still receive their passports late. For this reason, we request a response from the Department detailing the following no later than August 13, 2021:

1. How does the Department intend to reduce the backlog of applications and hasten the approval of pending applications?
2. What steps, if any, has the Bureau taken to make Passport Agencies and Centers more accessible to non-emergency applicants?
3. How many employees does the Bureau have dedicated to handling passport requests and how does this number compare to June 2020?
4. What steps, if any, has the Bureau taken to return more employees to full-time in-person work both at home and abroad?

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and for your continued service to protect the lives and interests of U.S. citizens overseas.

Sincerely,



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Scott Fitzgerald  
Member of Congress



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Steve Chabot  
Member of Congress



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Virginia Foxx  
Member of Congress



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Bruce Westerman  
Member of Congress

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State- Bureau of Consular Affairs, "U.S. Passports: How to Get my U.S. Passport Fast," n.d. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/get-fast.html>.



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Tom McClintock  
Member of Congress



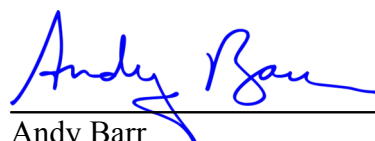
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Eric A. "Rick" Crawford  
Member of Congress



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Ken Buck  
Member of Congress



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Andy Barr  
Member of Congress



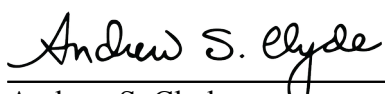
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Bob Gibbs  
Member of Congress



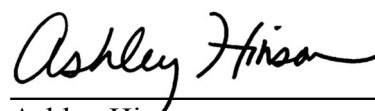
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Michelle Steel  
Member of Congress



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Andrew S. Clyde  
Member of Congress



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Ashley Hinson  
Member of Congress



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Ben Cline  
Member of Congress



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Stephanie Bice  
Member of Congress



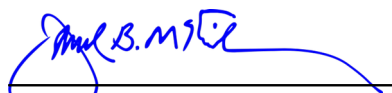
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Markwayne Mullin  
Member of Congress



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Mike Kelly  
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress



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Maria Elvira Salazar  
Member of Congress



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Chip Roy  
Member of Congress



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Brad R. Wenstrup, D.P.M.  
Member of Congress



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Peter Meijer M.C.  
Member of Congress



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Glenn Grothman  
Member of Congress



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French Hill  
Member of Congress



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Chris Jacobs  
Member of Congress



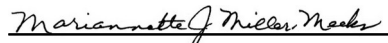
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Barry Loudermilk  
Member of Congress



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Christopher H. Smith  
Member of Congress



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Mariannette Miller-Meeks,  
M.D.  
Member of Congress



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Mark E. Green, MD  
Member of Congress



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Fred Keller  
Member of Congress



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Bryan Steil  
Member of Congress



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Ken Buck  
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David G. Valadao  
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Nicole Malliotakis  
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Bob Good  
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Diana Harshbarger  
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Kevin Hern  
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Michael R. Turner  
Member of Congress



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W. Gregory Steube  
Member of Congress



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Brian Mast  
Member of Congress



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Vincente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress



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Doug Lamborn  
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Louie Gohmert  
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Andrew R. Garbarino  
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