Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 16, 2023

The Honorable Rita Bitter
Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Bitter,

Our constituents rely on the efficient and predictable provision of government services to make decisions and plan their lives. We know that the State Department can face unexpected challenges just like any large institution, but when those challenges persist, our constituents deserve explanations, communication, and recompense.

Last month, Secretary Antony Blinken testified before the House Appropriations Committee about the "dramatic" increase in passport requests, noting that the State Department is "*getting 500,000 applications* a *week* for a *passport*. *That's 30* to *40% above last year*."[1] Congressional offices subsequently have been experiencing an influx of constituent requests for assistance on passports, now consisting of a disproportionate percentage of our Office's constituent services caseload. Moreover, although the State Department issued roughly 22 million passport applications last fiscal year, it is clear that applications this year are on pace to exceed that number by 18%--suggesting that currently extended wait times could continue to increase.[2]

These processing delays and subsequent influx of requests to Congressional offices cause added stress for our constituents around long-planned travel and sometimes require them to pay additional money for expedited processing and/or overnight shipping fees they otherwise would not have pursued. Meanwhile, Congressional offices are having to dedicate additional time and resources that could be devoted to other constituent service demands.

We understand that passport processing challenges have coincided with the beta-test rollout of the Online Passport Renewal (OPR) system. We applaud the State Department's efforts to streamline and improve response timing for our constituents seeking to renew their passports online, but questions remain regarding how the OPR system has been implemented, how this system was communicated to our constituents, and the level of oversight it has received from the State Department.

Finally, we ask that the State Department improve its internal communications among passport agencies, as well as external communications to Congressional offices, and most importantly, to our constituents, about efficiently navigating passport processing challenges. Moreover, our constituents deserve clearer communication about current estimated turnaround times, both at the application stage and while their application is in process, if their estimated receipt time changes. In addition, our Congressional offices and our constituents need to receive the same information

and guidance about what services are and are not available. Congressional offices are repeatedly experiencing instances where our constituents report that State's Passport Offices gave constituents expectations of our Congressional Offices' ability to assist them that conflicted with the guidance that State has provided to our Offices, such as the timelines we must follow in order to submit appointment requests.

To help Congress understand the current passport delays, please provide answers to the following questions:

1. How many new passport applications has the State Department received since January 1, 2023?

2. How many passport renewal applications has the State Department received since January 1, 2023?

3. How many new passport applications has the State Department processed since January 1, 2023?

4. How many passport renewals has the State Department processed since January 1, 2023?

5. How many new passport applications are currently in the State Department's queue to be processed?

6. How many passport renewal applications are currently in the State Department's queue to be processed?

7. How is passport application workload distributed/assigned to different passport offices around the country?

8. How does State address errors made in its passport processing? For instance, when application materials are lost, constituents receive the wrong passport, or there are delays or lack of clarity in notifying applicants of errors in their applications?

9. How does State address instances in which it is unable to meet its predicted timeline to applicants, which may necessitate them to pay additional overnight shipping charges?

    a. Would State consider issuing refunds to applicants who paid for expedited shipping but did not receive their passport within the promised timeline?

10. Has State created a process for assisting applicants if it loses the applicant's identifying documentation (birth certificates, naturalization certificates etc)? If not, why?

11. How was the option to opt-in to OPR presented to applicants?

    a. Was it made clear that the system was in Beta-testing?

b. Were the potential risks of opting-in to OPR, such as longer processing times, errors, or lack of access to human assistance, made clear to applicants?

12. Our offices have heard reports of OPR-related delays dating back to November, 2022.

b. Does State have a procedure for manual human intervention in instances where errors with the automated OPR system resulted in longer processing times? If not, why?

c. Does State believe the OPR system would benefit from a manual intervention process in the case of persistent delays? If not, why? If so, has one been implemented? If not, why?

13. What are the metrics State is using to evaluate the performance of OPR? How is OPR performing on those metrics?

14. How does State currently view the future of OPR?

15. How has State decided what information to share with the general public about the passport delays?

16. Has State identified problems with how different Passport Offices share information about the status of an applicant's passport?

a. If so, what is State's plan to improve coordination between Offices?

17. How has State developed its messaging to the public about what Congressional Offices can provide to their constituents in terms of passport services?

18. How is State prioritizing the scheduling of limited counter appointments at passport agencies across the country, including for life-or-death emergencies and Congressional requests?

a. Do you have a plan to increase the number of available in-person appointments at Passport Offices in the future?

19: Please provide a timeline for the return of processing times to levels seen before the current spike in passport demand.

20: Please identify specific resources or support from Congress that will either alleviate the current backlog or prevent future backlogs.

We are grateful for your attention to these issues on behalf of our constituents.

Sincerely,

Nikema Williams
Member of Congress

Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress

María Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress

Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress

Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress

Colin Z. Allred
Member of Congress

Dan Crenshaw
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

Patrick K. Ryan
Member of Congress

Scott DesJarlais, M.D.
Member of Congress

Greg Landsman
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Pete Stauber
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Kathy Manning
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

French Hill
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress

Lori Chavez-DeRemer
Member of Congress

Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress

Max L. Miller
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

Gregory F. Murphy, M.D.
Member of Congress

Ashley Hinson
Member of Congress

Ryan K. Zinke
Member of Congress

Laurel M. Lee
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

Tim Burchett
Member of Congress

Dina Titus
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress

Rich McCormick, MD, MBA
Member of Congress

Michael V. Lawler
Member of Congress

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Michael Guest
Member of Congress

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress

Greg Stanton
Member of Congress

Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress

Jay Obernolte
Member of Congress

Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Susie Lee
Member of Congress

Greg Casar
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

Dan Goldman
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress

Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress

Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Nancy Mace
Member of Congress

Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress

Michael R. Turner
Member of Congress

Ed Case
Member of Congress

Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress

Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress

Yadira Caraveo, M.D.
Member of Congress

Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

Julia Letlow
Member of Congress

Monica De La Cruz
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Lucy McBath
Member of Congress

David J. Trone
Member of Congress

Michael Waltz
Member of Congress

Lloyd Smucker
Member of Congress

Rudy Yakym III
Member of Congress

W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress

Jill Tokuda
Member of Congress

Josh Harder
Member of Congress

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

Angie Craig
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress

James C. Moylan
Member of Congress

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

Michael T. McCaul
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Kevin Kiley
Member of Congress

Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Andy Kim
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

Keith Self
Member of Congress

John R. Carter
Member of Congress

Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress

Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress

Sam Graves
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Valerie P. Foushee
Member of Congress

Charles J. "Chuck"
Fleischmann
Member of Congress

Brad Finstad
Member of Congress

J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Zach Nunn
Member of Congress

Dale W. Strong
Member of Congress

Tom McClintock
Member of Congress

Brandon WIlliams
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

Hillary J. Scholten
Member of Congress

Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress

Donald Norcross
Member of Congress

Blake D. Moore
Member of Congress

Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

C. Scott Franklin
Member of Congress

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress

Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress

Juan Ciscomani
Member of Congress

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

James A. Himes
Member of Congress

John James
Member of Congress

Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress

Cori Bush
Member of Congress

Michael Cloud
Member of Congress

Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Chris Pappas
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress

Eric A. "Rick" Crawford
Member of Congress

Daniel Webster
Member of Congress

Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress

Marcus J. Molinaro
Member of Congress

Cory Mills
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

Mike Rogers
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

David Kustoff
Member of Congress

Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress

William R. Timmons, IV
Member of Congress

Patrick T. McHenry
Member of Congress

Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Mark E. Amodei
Member of Congress

Chuck Edwards
Member of Congress

Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress

Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress

Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

Stephanie Bice
Member of Congress

Donald G. Davis
Member of Congress

Brett Guthrie
Member of Congress

Richard Hudson
Member of Congress

Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress

Harriet M. Hageman
Member of Congress

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Marie Gluesenkamp Perez
Member of Congress

David P. Joyce
Member of Congress

Summer Lee
Member of Congress

Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress

Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

Ken Calvert
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress