

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 19, 2021

The Honorable Ian G. Brownlee
Acting Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Consular Affairs
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Brownlee:

In June of 2021, as many Americans began to prepare for a life post-COVID, there was an air of excitement. Nationally, 41% of Americans were fully vaccinated and more than 50% were partially vaccinated. During the height of the pandemic, people were deeply concerned about losing jobs, housing and loved ones. After 15 months of isolation, people looked forward to travelling internationally to attend postponed-weddings and events, reconnect with family members in other countries, and study abroad. Unfortunately, for many, obtaining a passport has been rendered almost impossible due to staffing issues at State Department Passport Agencies and an overwhelming yet foreseeable spike in demand. We ask that you immediately address this situation so our constituents, who have refrained from travel for more than a year, can safely visit loved ones in other countries as needed.

When the pandemic forced a nationwide shut down in mid-March of last year, a large backlog of passport applications formed as Bureau of Consular Affairs staff transitioned to remote work. Additionally, as a result of travel restrictions and economic hardship, many postponed the renewal of their passport and the associated cost until a time when they would be able to use it. Given this foreseeable trend, it is unclear why more than a year later there was not more forethought put into the inevitable wave of passport applications as travel restrictions eased and the world opened back up. As a result of this backlog, our district offices have been receiving hundreds of calls and casework requests per week, and they have been told the current processing time is upwards of 20 weeks, nearly five times as long as the usual wait time. Even emergency appointments have been impossible to arrange in some of the most dire circumstances.

What's more, our staff have found it increasingly difficult to contact Passport Agency staff and they rarely receive responses to congressional inquiries and requests. While some Passport Agency staff have been helpful and responsive when our staff do get through, some have found staff at certain offices to be unhelpful and dismissive. The constituents that come to our office are desperate, and in many cases, poised to lose hundreds of dollars on unused plane tickets and hotel reservations or miss important family events like weddings and funerals. Because our offices are unable to receive reliable updates, we are unable to assuage our constituents'

concerns. This issue has become so ubiquitous that there is currently language in the report to accompany the FY 2022 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill directing the allocation of funds toward stockpiling physical passport books and processing passports in a timely manner.

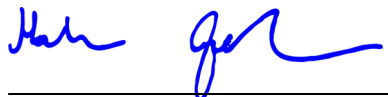
In all this confusion and desperation, bad actors have obtained sought-after passport appointments and are auctioning them off on social media. We have heard of constituents so desperate for appointments that they have paid upward of \$200 to obtain one. This shortage is creating a black market and we have heard reports that State Department Passport Agencies are allowing appointments that do not match scheduled names.

The time for action is long overdue. We urge you to reexamine your plan to reopen, adequately staff and supply Passport Agencies, and provide a timeline for reducing this outrageous backlog. While we understand that the pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges, the federal government did not shut down, staffing was not significantly reduced, and there was no lapse in appropriations for the operations of component agencies. After a year of desolation and separation, it is unconscionable that Americans should have to face yet another bureaucratic barrier. We appreciate your cooperation and look forward to working with you to resolve this issue.

Sincerely,



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Hakeem S. Jeffries
Member of Congress



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



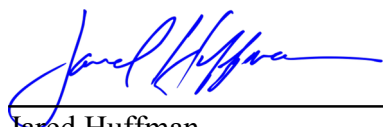
Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Bill Johnson
Member of Congress



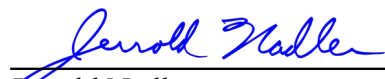
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



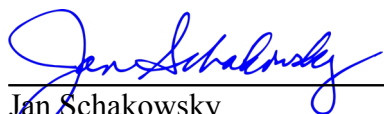
Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress



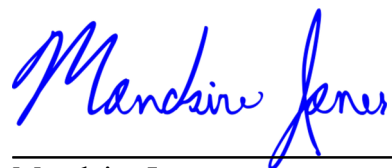
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



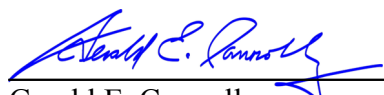
Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



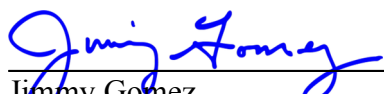
Mondair Jones
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress



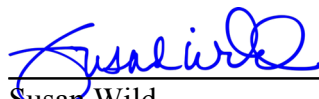
Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



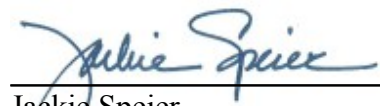
Marie Newman
Member of Congress



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Susan Wild
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Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Tim Ryan
Member of Congress



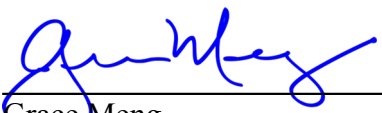
Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress



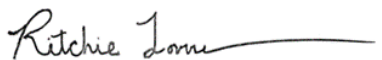
Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



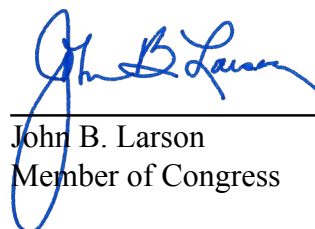
Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



John B. Larson
Member of Congress



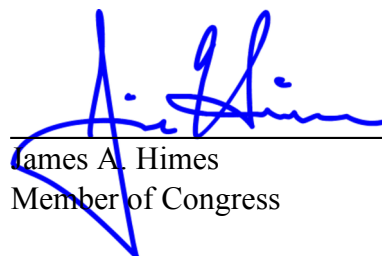
Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress



Steven M. Palazzo
Member of Congress



Mike Doyle
Member of Congress



James A. Himes
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Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



David E. Price
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John Yarmuth
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Eddie Bernice Johnson
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Norma J. Torres
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Teresa Leger Fernández
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Mark DeSaulnier
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Chrissy Houlahan
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