

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0550

June 18, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I am writing to bring to your attention a nationwide delay in processing U.S. passports, which I urge you to immediately deem an administration priority and surge government processing capacity as soon as possible.

With increasing numbers of our population reaching fully-vaccinated status and communities reopening around the world, Americans are eager to travel, both domestically and abroad. Understandably, this enthusiasm for embracing normalcy has resulted in an unprecedented number of U.S. passport applications and renewals.

Unfortunately, State Department resources have not been restored to full pre-COVID capacity, and passport office staffing levels remain restricted, with limited appointments and fulfillment capabilities. It appears administrative capabilities have not been enhanced to meet demand or are insufficient. As a result, timely citizen needs cannot be met.

The limitation of passport services is impactful in numerous ways. Citizens unable to attain emergency passport services harm essential travel such as travel to adopt, attend funerals, or visit ailing relatives. Additionally, leisure travel is made more difficult even though it is a valuable contributor to the American economic recovery through the myriad of supporting industries including airport and airline employees, cruise lines, fuel suppliers, hotels, restaurants, transportation and more. Travel-dependent leisure and hospitality is the largest small-business employer in the United States,¹ and the least the government can do to facilitate a rebounding economy in these fields is to provide the necessary government document services underlying the industry.

Now that the country is increasingly vaccinated, and both essential and non-essential employees have had ample opportunity to be vaccinated, it would be safe, reasonable, and responsible to resume full staffing, add hours of service and operations to assist customers, and to surge support resources to alleviate overburdened offices and resume timely U.S. Passport services.

My office has observed firsthand the degree to which current staff are working hard to meet need, and for that, my constituents are very grateful. But more help is needed in this unprecedented time, and it is within your ability to bring these team members support. Only the federal government can fix this problem right away to restore international travel. We owe the American people responsive and timely essential services.

In addition to an immediate scaling of processing resources, I respectfully request the following information: how many passports can be processed in a day at the current staffing capacity in U.S. passport offices and how does that number compare to the amount that could be processed at pre-COVID capacity. Further, it would be helpful to learn how many applications the offices are receiving per day at present and how that number compares to pre-COVID quantities. I would also appreciate a copy of the most recent guidelines detailing staffing capacity in U.S. passport offices.

On behalf of our constituents, I thank you for your attention and look forward to a responsive, timely, solution-oriented plan.

Sincerely,



Darrell E. Issa
Member of Congress

ⁱ https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Fact-Sheet_Travel-Jobs.pdf