

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 19, 2021

Mr. Ian G. Brownlee
Acting Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State
600 19th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Brownlee:

There is an unprecedented backlog of passport applications because of the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently hindering international travel for millions of Americans. I strongly urge the State Department to take urgent measures to immediately reduce the backlog, expand in-person renewals, and ease travel for my constituents as soon as possible.

Since the United States has made progress toward recovering from the pandemic, many Americans are seeking to resume travel abroad as vaccination rates increase and international travel restrictions are rescinded. However, those who need to apply for or renew their passports are currently facing wait times of up to eighteen weeks. As a result, in recent months, passport inquiries have spiked to become the single leading type of constituent casework inquiries to Congressional offices. For instance, my office is currently assisting constituents with more than 324 passport cases.

Congressional offices are even struggling to help secure emergency passport appointments for those facing extraordinary life-or-death emergencies. While I appreciate that the pandemic presented challenges for the Bureau, I believe more must be done to cut the current backlog and reduce processing times for Americans. Furthermore, the strict exceptions and limited availability of appointments for urgent non-emergency travel has resulted in a complicated and unworkable patchwork system, with constituents traveling across state lines just to try to secure an appointment, people selling passport appointments online, and many Americans losing thousands of dollars because they are being forced to cancel and rebook travel arrangements.

The Bureau must do everything possible please to achieve full in-person staffing at passport processing centers, as well as expedite surge staffing to help reduce the backlog as soon as possible. In addition, I encourage State to expand in-person renewals and passport acceptance fairs, address additional delays in the process such as USPS shipping, and work with Congress to make additional improvements.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this issue that is very important to my constituents and our nation's economic recovery and vitality.

Sincerely,



Josh Gottheimer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS