

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 1, 2023

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

Dear Assistant Secretary Bitter,

Over the past few months, our offices on both sides of the state line have been inundated with requests from constituents experiencing delays in new or renewed passport applications. Today, we write to request an explanation of the root cause of these delays and an updated timeline for when folks in our districts should expect processing rates to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Secretary Blinken has testified that the Department of State's volume of passport requests is 30-40 percent above last year's volume, but we have yet to see sufficient solutions to address the processing backlog. Consequentially, these delays are likely to persist, forcing our constituents to pay extra for expedited approvals or renewals just days before their planned travel.

These nationwide delays are especially challenging for our communities in the Kansas City metro region due to the long distance to the nearest passport agency in Hot Springs, Arkansas – a seven-hour drive away. When a constituent is unable to renew a passport through traditional means and needs it urgently issued, sometimes their only option is traveling to a passport agency. Yet, even for the few individuals who are able to make this journey, these agencies can have limited appointment availability.

We understand that high demand has put enormous pressure on the agency's ability to process applications more efficiently. But with demand remaining high, actions must be taken to improve wait times and solve processing issues. We respectfully request answers to the following inquiries:

1. What steps has the agency taken to hire additional staff and what workforce challenges is the agency facing?
2. The President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 requested \$163 million for the Department of State to improve the delivery of passport services through an online portal; but the most recent online renewal service had to be paused due to technical issues. What is the current status of adjustments to the online renewal service? What is the timeline for bringing the service back online?

3. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2023 requires a review of the geographic diversity of passport agencies to identify areas with high demand and no in-person access. A passport agency in the Kansas City metro region would be enormously beneficial to our constituents. What is the status of this review?
4. Does the Bureau for Consular Affairs have plans to open new passport agencies? How will the review of the passport agencies' geographic diversity impact these plans?

Sincerely,

A blue ink handwritten signature, appearing to be 'S. Davids', with a large loop at the end.

Rep. Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress

A blue ink handwritten signature, appearing to be 'Emanuel Cleaver, II', with a large circular flourish.

Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress