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United States Senate

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March 30, 2023

Ms. Naz Durakoglu
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Legislative Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520-0099

Dear Assistant Secretary Durakoglu:

I write regarding the State Department's response to the unprecedented demand for passports. First, my sincere gratitude goes to the passport agencies for assisting my staff in recent weeks with many of my constituents' time-sensitive passport applications and expedited appointments for imminent travel.

A significant number of my constituents have contacted me to express their frustration over the delays in passport application processing times and a lack of responsiveness from passport agency officials. Many of these applicants applied with ample time prior to travel, yet have found themselves in a panic, wondering whether their passports will arrive in time for a trip they have had planned, in certain cases for over a year. In some cases, applicants were forced to cancel trips, losing a significant amount of money or missing once-in-a-lifetime events.

I understand that you have taken steps to mitigate this situation in the short-term, including the establishment of a task force to oversee the rollout of satellite passport adjudication offices, authorization of overtime for employees, and increased hiring of adjudicators and customer service agents to staff phone lines. Unfortunately, there still appears to be a significant lag in processing applications. Please advise as to how many passports the State Department is processing that were filed on or before February 1, 2023.

The delays also extend to the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) toll-free phone line. My constituents have advised that phone hold times for the NPIC are averaging two to four hours. My staff has also experienced significant hold times on the Congressional line for various passport agencies, and in some instances, the Congressional line is forwarded to voicemail, and regrettably, messages are not returned. Please advise as to the State Department's protocol for answering Congressional passport-related inquiries. What is the anticipated timeframe for responses to urgent Congressional passport-related inquiries made 1) by email and 2) by phone?

There also appears to be a lack of available in-person appointments for constituents to obtain a passport at an area passport agency. Is there a plan to increase appointments at agencies around the country?

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I appreciate the efforts of the State Department in responding to the surge, but I remain concerned about the timeline for implementing these changes in the short-term. Additionally, is there a plan in place to ensure the agency is prepared for this type of scenario should it occur in the future?

I would appreciate your reviewing this matter and advising me in writing of your findings. If you need additional information, please contact Ms. Naki Frierson of my staff at (301) 545-1500 or at naki_frierson@vanhollen.senate.gov. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Van Hollen", with a stylized, flowing script.

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

CVH/nf