

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 19, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I write to you with concerns about processing time for passport applications, a significant issue for constituents in my state and nationwide. Current wait times – up to 18 weeks for routine service and 12 for expedited service – well exceed pre-pandemic levels, and they are untenable for Americans seeking to resume international travel and reconnect with friends and loved ones abroad. Moreover, my staff and constituents continue to receive mixed guidance regarding the extent to which congressional offices can request passport appointments, which have themselves become quite difficult to secure, or expedited processing for constituents' passport applications.

I commend this administration's efforts to tackle COVID-19 and maintain essential government services throughout the pandemic. I understand the financial and personnel strains the pandemic has placed on the Bureau of Consular Affairs in particular, and the challenges of meeting the surge in demand for passport services as more Americans are beginning to travel again. However, current wait times for passport appointments and processing have led to a backlog of nearly two million applications as current staffing and resource capacities have proven unable to meet the demand. My office has also experienced extensive delays in receiving responses from passport agencies regarding constituents' applications. I ask that the Department devote the necessary human, financial, and administrative resources to increase capacity to address this backlog and return processing times to pre-pandemic levels as an urgent priority.

Specifically, I would be grateful if you could provide the following:

- A description of the Department's strategy to address this issue;
- A timeline for hiring full-time staff and contractors to meet the surge in demands at passport agencies and call centers across the country; and
- Additional budgetary resources needed to implement this strategy, including necessary overtime and/or additional contractor costs.

Thank you in advance for your work and timely response. I look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Murphy", positioned above a horizontal line.

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator