

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 19, 2023

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

Dear Assistant Secretary Bitter:

As you know, delays in processing passport requests present a major challenge for our constituents and our offices. While we recognize the Department continues to receive an influx of applications, we are concerned the Department lacks the technological systems needed to address the backlog of passport requests. The Department is not equipped to provide more timely information to applicants, expedite requests for near-term travel, or proactively assign resources to meet surges in demand. We are writing to encourage the Department to invite commercial software companies to help address shortcomings of the Department's legacy information technology (IT) systems, starting with pilot projects that can be launched in the coming months and quickly scaled if shown to be successful.

Earlier this year, the Department launched the Online Passport Renewal (OPR) pilot to allow individuals to renew their passport online. While the Department should be applauded for taking the initiative, the OPR pilot could not keep up with demand before it was turned off in March 2023. It appears the Department lacks a way to accurately predict demand increases and optimize resourcing decisions to meet the needs on the ground, as is. Its legacy systems to process passport requests are out of date, require frequent downtime, and are not cloud-based, which makes it difficult to quickly scale as the volume of passport requests increases. Additionally, the information necessary to efficiently conduct passport interviews exists across multiple systems, requiring interviewers to access multiple databases throughout the course of an interview.

We understand it might not be feasible to immediately update these systems. In fact, incurring system downtime, even on a temporary basis, may increase the backlog of current passport requests. Instead, we encourage the Department to identify and pilot commercial software options that could augment legacy systems. **We respectfully encourage the Department to host a competition, no later than ninety days after receipt of this letter, to review and assess existing commercial software solutions that can:**

- Reduce the backlog of passport requests and improve the processing time;
- Be deployed immediately, without disrupting the legacy systems;
- Leverage cloud-based systems that can be scaled as needed;
- Provide tools to optimize resource allocation, including identifying regions that require additional passport reviewers;
- Consolidate all relevant information into a single system making it easier for passport interviewers to review necessary information; and

- Include rigorous security features, including access restrictions that ensure only authorized users have access to data, consistent with applicable laws.

We look forward to your response and hope the Department will take immediate action to assess and pilot commercial software solutions.

Sincerely,



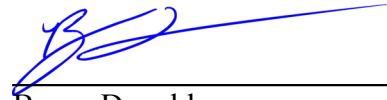
Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress



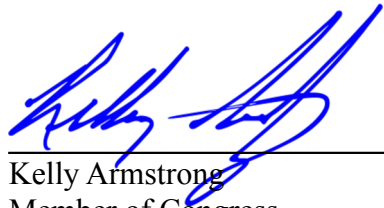
David J. Trone
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Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
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Kelly Armstrong
Member of Congress



Matthew Rosendale, Sr.
Member of Congress



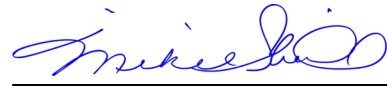
Colin Z. Allred
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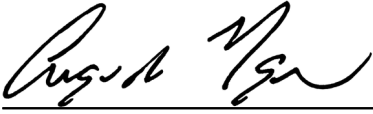
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