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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

August 2, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I am deeply concerned about mounting reports in recent weeks of unprecedented delays in passport processing by the Department of State, affecting thousands of American citizens and businesses. Although I understand and appreciate the “perfect storm” of events, many related to the COVID pandemic, that created this situation, the Department must prioritize resolving this matter, and utilize all appropriate resources to address the current delays in processing passport applications. Too many Americans, including many of my constituents, are waiting weeks or months to get their passports, often upending personal and professional plans. In some dire cases, people have not been able to travel for family or medical emergencies.

I urge the Department of State to redouble efforts to surge resources to reduce current processing times and to assure that American citizens do not face similar occurrences in the future. As the volume of applications rise, it is imperative that the Department promptly prioritizes solving the backlog of applications and enabling passport services to resume operating efficiently. As this issue is affecting Americans across the country, I stand ready to work with the Department to help ease this burden.

I therefore request responses to the following questions:

- What is the current backlog and anticipated timeline, assuming no additional action, before processing returns to normal?
- What current challenges are causing the backlog in processing passport applications? What specific bottlenecks in the system have you identified?
- What is the State Department doing to resolve these bottlenecks and challenges? Are more staff needed? Are there funding or budget shortfalls?
- How is the State Department working to reducing processing times for passport applications?
- What is the current number of passports that are being received weekly and how many are processed weekly?
- What percentage of pre-pandemic staff are currently working processing applications and what is the Department’s strategy to return staffing to pre-pandemic levels?

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
Chairman