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August 5, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington DC, 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I am very concerned about the processing time for passport renewals. Processing times outlined on the State Department's website of up to 18 weeks for routine applications and up to 12 weeks for expedited applications are causing considerable concern. While I understand these represent "worst-case" scenarios and the State Department strives to process applications as quickly as possible, applicants are experiencing significant, unacceptable disruptions as they attempt to travel overseas.

Not only must the backlog be reduced, but it must be done with new technology that will update and streamline the process to avoid a repeat of this situation. New technology can preserve, indeed enhance, the security as well as efficiency of passport renewal. An online system that leverages technological solutions, for example, could modernize and streamline the process. These mechanisms should be made cost-effective, giving citizens better service and the nation more value.

As the Department continues to receive between 300,000 and 370,000 new applications each week through the month of July, I request you immediately continue onboarding additional staff at passport agencies and processing centers consistent with the Diplomacy Strong framework. We must return passport services to pre-pandemic levels as quickly as possible. As part of that effort, the Department should expand capacity and access to COVID vaccines and undertake any necessary safety protocols to protect workers.

I also urge you to expand to the maximum extent practical access to overtime for your administrative and management staff to increase production. It is my understanding that such increased overtime could result in an additional 20,000 hours per month resulting in increased processing of approximately 100,000 applications per month. You should also strongly consider increased support contractors, as necessary, to process, print, and deliver passports faster.

I appreciate the efforts the Department is taking to reduce the backlog and return to pre-pandemic processing times. As that occurs, I look forward to your proposals to improve, streamline, and modernize the process.

Thank you for your efforts to continue reducing the delays in processing passport applications. I look forward to an update on your efforts to address this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" being the most prominent.

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator