

Dear Congressional Colleagues,

We recognize you are receiving many requests from constituents who are distressed that passport delays are disrupting travel plans. We are also aware that you are not receiving timely responses to all of your inquiries about specific applications or appointment availability at agencies or centers. We regret the communication lapses and are working hard to make improvements.

Managing Customer Expectations about Processing Times

On June 15, we updated the processing information online to clarify for customers what to expect:

- **Routine service can take up to 18 weeks** from the day a customer submits their application to the day they receive a new passport. The 18-week timeframe includes up to 12 weeks for application processing and up to six weeks for mailing times on the front and back end.
- **Expedited service can take up to 12 weeks** from the day a customer submits their application to the day they receive a new passport. The 12-week timeframe includes up to six weeks for application processing and up to six weeks for mailing times on the front and back end.

TIP: Please suggest constituents send their applications to us via trackable mail. This allows them to track their application before it enters our system and can be done whether they are applying at an acceptance facility or by mail. They should also pay an extra \$17.56 for 1-2 day delivery for the return of their new passports.

Service Partner Challenges

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and the Department of Treasury-operated Citibank lockboxes are two key service providers involved with the front-end of the application. Both have been experiencing operational issues. The USPS helps us sort and streamline incoming applications. The lockbox facilities process payments, enter applications into our systems, and ship the physical applications to our agencies and centers. Service partner operational delays are currently up to six weeks after the passport was mailed. We do not have access to and cannot locate applications at these stages. We have been working to help Citibank increase their capacity and they are now able to double the number of people working in their facility for double the output. In July, we expect the state of Delaware to relax its social distancing requirement, which should allow them to further increase staffing and expand onsite operations.

Our public call center, the National Passport Information Center (NPIC), is dealing with unprecedented volume, causing extensive wait times, dropped calls, and other issues. In just the

first six months of this year, NPIC has received nearly 3 million customer calls and e-mails, an amount equivalent to some entire previous years. NPIC has and will continue to prioritize congressional calls and e-mails. As of June 25, the wait time on NPIC's congressional line is about five minutes, although we regret that there were unacceptable waits until recently. The phone number for the NPIC Congressional Desk, which is for the exclusive use of congressional offices, is 1-877-687-2778. We are planning to increase the number of staff working the Congressional Desk from 54 to 100-150. With these measures, we expect a return to normal wait times for congressional calls and more normal levels of responsiveness to congressional e-mails in early July, although it may take longer for NPIC to bring on enough new staff to stabilize the public line.

TIP: Instead of calling, please ask your constituents to check their application status on passportstatus.state.gov. While it may take 6 weeks for their status to register as "In Process," this 24/7 online tool provides the same information about where an application is in the process as a call center representative. NPIC's automated messaging will begin to direct customers who would like to check the status of their application to our website beginning July 7th, which will free up significant resources to handle more urgent customer and Congressional needs.

Appointments

We have heard from you, as well as from countless desperate customers about the need for appointments at our passport agencies and centers for last minute travel. Given the extremely high demand and extremely low availability of appointments, we cannot guarantee appointments for all travelers and we must continue to prioritize applicants with life-or-death travel. Even though in the past year we have been able to assist many of you with appointment request, at this time we must that you limit your appointment requests to life-or-death cases or prioritize constituent cases based on travel dates.

TIP: Customers should not rely on an appointment to receive a passport. Customers should plan around the 18-week and 12-week door-to-door processing times described on travel.state.gov/passports.

TIP: Please do not send requests for appointments if your constituent's travel is more than five days away.

In the past year, we have been able to assist many congressional staffers with requests for appointments. But in our peak season, we now ask that you limit your appointment requests to life-or-death cases or prioritize constituent cases based on travel dates.

Returning Staff

On a bright note, as you may be aware, the opening of our passport agencies and centers is directly linked to the Department's Diplomacy Strong framework, a conditions-based, three-phase plan for returning personnel to the workplace based on federal guidelines. Under Diplomacy Strong, the Department authorizes Weather and Safety Leave (WSL) for individuals who work in phase one and phase two facilities and are at high risk for negative outcomes from Covid-19. As of late June 2021, approximately 17 percent of our passport adjudicative staff across the country remain on WSL and only one passport agency is operating fully at phase three.

However, on June 24, the Department approved 16 geographic locations for movement from Phase 2 to Phase 3. Those locations include Philadelphia, Atlanta, Buffalo, San Juan, Chicago, Dallas, Seattle, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Orleans, Tucson, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Employees at these locations who are on Weather and Safety Leave are being notified to report back to work as of July 12, which will increase our capacity to adjudicate applications.

Special Services for Congressional Offices

It is important for us to be aware of your constituents' needs and we are eager to return to a more reliable and responsive partner for you. In the meantime, we appreciate your efforts to help us to help you.

TIP: Submit each constituent inquiry to us only once using one of two methods: email to NPIC or email to the agency or center Customer Service Office. You may want to ask your constituent if they have contacted another office with this request, as we are seeing the same cases through multiple channels of escalation.

Email the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at NPIC-CONG@state.gov, or email the Customer Service Manager at the Passport Agency or Center that serves your office. The contacts can be found at travel.state.gov/congress. Your congressional IP address enables you to access this site.

The Congressional NPIC phone number (877-687-2778) and email (NPIC-CONG@state.gov) are a special resource for congressional offices only and should not be shared with your constituents. Another resource is the after-hours emergencies phone line for use when there is life-or-death related travel that requires you to assist a constituent before or after 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. (ET), Monday through Friday. It is: 202-647-4000.

TIP: (This is a big one!): Collect credit card information (name, number, expiration date, and security number) from applicants that have immediate travel and that you are asking us to upgrade to expedite. This saves them and us the additional step of requesting payment information, freeing up resources. Please include the credit card information on the Privacy Act Waiver (PAW), which we will use as consent to process the payment at your office's behest.

When contacting NPIC, congressional staffers should provide:

- A [Privacy Act Waiver \(PAW\)](#) signed by the constituent.
- Applicant's full name
- Date of birth
- Application number, if known
- Date of travel, if applicable
- Description of the request and important information to share with passport agency
- Name of Congressional Member
- Subject line: "Constituent's Last Name/Application Number/Date of Travel (if applicable)."

TIP: Never advise your constituent to send a second application unless they have been instructed to do so by Passport Services.

TIP: Please do not mail applications or have your constituents mail applications directly to agencies and centers unless a customer service manager instructed you to do so. If an application is mailed directly to us without our knowledge, we cannot process it quickly.

Messages for your Constituents

We want your constituents to know what to expect, and we rely on you to help share the most up-to-date passport information.

Check expiration dates. Before they book their trip or purchase an airline ticket, they should check the expiration dates of family members' passports. Children's passports are valid for five years only.

Apply early. Constituents should apply at least six months in advance of their planned departure date.

Applicants should use trackable mail to quickly ship the application to us and purchase overnight delivery for us to return the completed passport.

Ensure applications are accurate and complete. Any issues with citizenship, ID, fees, or photos could cause delays well beyond the original 18 weeks.

Please add this information to your newsletter and share during your constituent calls. Consider reposting our messages on @TravelGov Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.