

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2249

To improve the timeliness, resiliency, and transparency of passport processing operations, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 11, 2023

Mr. LANKFORD (for himself and Mr. RICKETTS) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

A BILL

To improve the timeliness, resiliency, and transparency of passport processing operations, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Passport Act of 2023”.

5 **SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

6 It is the sense of Congress that—

7 (1) the Department of State’s handling of pass-
8 port processing during and since the COVID–19
9 pandemic—

10 (A) fell short of performance benchmarks;

1 (B) did not meet the needs of their con-
2 stituents; and

3 (C) led to a loss of confidence in the De-
4 partment of State;

5 (2) the Department of State’s failure to per-
6 form its duty to produce passports in a timely man-
7 ner led to unacceptable personal hardship and com-
8 plications to the travel plans for millions of Ameri-
9 cans; and

10 (3) the COVID–19 pandemic exposed short-
11 comings in the information technology infrastructure
12 of the Department of State’s passport processing
13 functions, which must be corrected.

14 **SEC. 3. ENSURING TIMELY ADJUDICATION OF PASSPORT**
15 **APPLICATIONS.**

16 (a) **PASSPORT PROCESSING DEADLINES.**—The As-
17 sistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs (referred
18 to in this section as the “Assistant Secretary”), in coordi-
19 nation with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for
20 Passport Services, shall ensure that all routine applica-
21 tions for a passport or for the renewal of a passport are
22 processed, on average, within 12 weeks of the receipt of
23 such application.

24 (b) **AVERAGE PASSPORT PROCESSING TIME.**—Not
25 less frequently than weekly, the Assistant Secretary shall

1 make publicly available on a website of the Department
2 of State information related to the average expected proc-
3 essing time for applications for a passport and for the re-
4 newal of a passport.

5 (c) NOTIFICATION OF FAILURE TO MEET DEAD-
6 LINE.—If the average processing times referred to in sub-
7 section (b) fail to meet the 12-week requirement for 4 con-
8 secutive weeks—

9 (1) the Assistant Secretary, not later than 7
10 days after such failure, shall notify the appropriate
11 congressional committees of the circumstances re-
12 lated to such failure;

13 (2) the Assistant Secretary, not later than 7
14 days following the initial notification under para-
15 graph (1), shall submit a second notification to the
16 appropriate congressional committees that—

17 (A) assesses the factors contributing to the
18 passport processing delays; and

19 (B) includes a plan for returning to com-
20 pliance with the 12-week requirement referred
21 to in subsection (a); and

22 (3) the Assistant Secretary shall continue to
23 submit weekly compliance plans to the appropriate
24 congressional committees and no personnel from the
25 Passport Services Division of the Bureau of Con-

1 sular Affairs may be approved for telework or re-
2 mote work until the Assistant Secretary certifies
3 that the average passport processing time is in com-
4 pliance with the 12-week requirement for 3 consecu-
5 tive weeks.

6 **SEC. 4. STRENGTHENING PASSPORT PROCESSING OPER-**
7 **ATIONS DURING SEASONS OF HIGH DEMAND.**

8 (a) REASSIGNMENT OF PERSONNEL.—If the average
9 passport processing time exceeds the 12-week requirement
10 required under section 3(a), the Secretary of State is au-
11 thorized to reassign Department of State personnel who
12 do not work for the Bureau of Consular Affairs to assist
13 with the processing and adjudication of passport applica-
14 tions until the Bureau is in compliance with such require-
15 ment.

16 (b) TRAINING PLAN.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after
18 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
19 of State, in consultation with the Assistant Sec-
20 retary of State for Consular Affairs, shall establish
21 a plan for training Department of State personnel
22 who do not work for the Bureau of Consular Affairs
23 to process and adjudicate passport applications.

24 (2) CAPACITY.—The plan established pursuant
25 to paragraph (1) shall ensure that there are always

1 a sufficient number of Department of State per-
2 sonnel outside of the Bureau of Consular Affairs
3 who are capable of processing and adjudicating pass-
4 port applications to prevent a significant backlog of
5 unprocessed passport applications during anticipated
6 periods of high demand.

7 **SEC. 5. SUSTAINING PASSPORT PROCESSING OPERATIONS**
8 **DURING NATIONAL EMERGENCIES.**

9 (a) PRELIMINARY PLAN.—Not later than 1 year after
10 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of
11 State, in consultation with the Assistant Secretary of
12 State for Consular Affairs, shall submit a preliminary plan
13 to the appropriate congressional committees that outlines
14 how the Bureau of Consular Affairs will sustain passport
15 processing operations and functions in the event of a na-
16 tional emergency that warrants the suspension of normal
17 operations.

18 (b) CONTENTS.—The plan submitted pursuant to
19 subsection (a) shall include—

20 (1) strategies and plans for adjudicating pass-
21 port applications in a secure manner;

22 (2) an analysis of the feasibility of performing
23 any steps of the passport adjudication process re-
24 motely;

1 (3) plans for sustaining staffing and infrastruc-
2 ture on a limited and ongoing basis; and

3 (4) plans for resuming normal operations and
4 reducing any backlog of applications that prevent
5 compliance with the 12-week average passport proc-
6 essing time requirement under section 3(a).

7 (c) NOTIFICATION OF SUSPENSION OF NORMAL
8 PASSPORT PROCESSING OPERATIONS.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—If the President declares a
10 national emergency under the National Emergencies
11 Act (50 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.), section 203 of the
12 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50
13 U.S.C. 1702), or section 501 of the Robert T. Staf-
14 ford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act
15 (50 U.S.C. 5191), or if the Secretary of Health and
16 Human Services declares a public health emergency
17 under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act
18 (42 U.S.C. 247d), the Secretary of State, not later
19 than 15 days after such declaration, shall submit a
20 report to the appropriate congressional committees
21 regarding whether such emergency necessitates a
22 suspension of normal operations for passport proc-
23 essing functions in the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

24 (2) CONTINUATION OF PASSPORT PROCESSING
25 OPERATIONS DURING EMERGENCY.—If the Secretary

1 of State determines that an emergency referred to in
2 paragraph (1) necessitates a suspension of normal
3 passport processing operations, the Secretary, not
4 later than 30 days after such determination, shall
5 submit a report to Congress that describes how the
6 Bureau of Consular Affairs plans to sustain pass-
7 port processing operations during such emergency at
8 the most productive level practicable.

9 **SEC. 6. STRENGTHENING PASSPORT CUSTOMER VISIBILITY**
10 **AND TRANSPARENCY.**

11 (a) **ONLINE STATUS TOOL.**—Not later than 2 years
12 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Assistant
13 Secretary of State for Consular Affairs shall develop a se-
14 cure, online tool that provides information to passport ap-
15 plicants of the status of their application in the following
16 stages:

- 17 (1) Submitted for processing.
- 18 (2) In process at a lockbox facility.
- 19 (3) Awaiting adjudication.
- 20 (4) In process of adjudication.
- 21 (5) Adjudicated with a result of approval or de-
22 nial.
- 23 (6) Materials shipped.

1 (b) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.—The tool developed
2 pursuant to subsection (a) shall include a display that in-
3 forms each passport applicant of—

4 (1) the date on which his or her passport appli-
5 cation was received;

6 (2) the estimated number of days until his or
7 her passport will be issued; and

8 (3) actions required from the passport applicant
9 to remedy any deficiencies in the application.

10 **SEC. 7. STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL PASSPORT INFOR-**
11 **MATION CENTER.**

12 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
13 gress that the National Passport Information Center (re-
14 ferred to in this section as “NPIC”) has failed to ade-
15 quately assist its customers.

16 (b) ONLINE CHAT FEATURE.—Not later than 30
17 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
18 retary of State shall direct NPIC to develop an online tool
19 with the capability for customers to correspond with cus-
20 tomer service representatives regarding questions and up-
21 dates pertaining to their application for a passport or for
22 the renewal of a passport.

23 (c) GAO REPORT.—Not later than 30 days after the
24 date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General
25 of the United States shall initiate a review of NPIC oper-

1 ations, which shall include an analysis of the quality with
2 which NPIC—

3 (1) responds to constituent inquiries by tele-
4 phone, including how long constituents are kept on
5 hold and their ability to be placed in a queue;

6 (2) provides personalized customer service; and

7 (3) maintains its telecommunications infra-
8 structure.

9 **SEC. 8. EXPANDING ACCESS TO PASSPORT ADJUDICATION**

10 **APPOINTMENTS.**

11 (a) **FINDING.**—Congress finds that since the suspen-
12 sion of normal operations in March 2020, the Department
13 of State—

14 (1) has adopted a policy of not providing adju-
15 dication services to individuals who arrive at a pass-
16 port agency or center without an appointment; and

17 (2) is offering fewer total adjudication appoint-
18 ments.

19 (b) **SENSE OF CONGRESS.**—It is the sense of Con-
20 gress that the Department of State should—

21 (1) increase the number of appointments at
22 each passport agency and center to a level that is
23 consistent with appointment offerings before the sus-
24 pension of normal operations in March 2020; and

