

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

April 17, 2023

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

Dear Assistant Secretary Bitter,

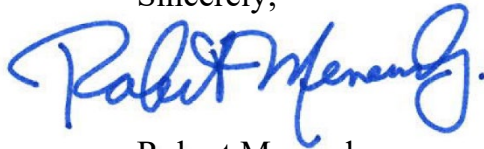
I write to you today regarding the substantial wait times for passport processing that my constituents in New Jersey and all Americans have been facing.

Ever since travel demand surged following the rollback of many COVID-19 restrictions, processing times for passports have increased across the country. My office has been inundated with calls from constituents concerned about whether they will receive their passports before their travel. Routine passport processing currently takes 10 to 13 weeks, a two-week increase from the previous processing wait time. While there exists an expedited process that takes seven to nine weeks, this option costs an extra \$60 and is still marred by a two-week increase in wait time. Also, while I understand the State Department is seeing between a 30 to 40 percent increase in the number of weekly applications when compared to the same time last year, this is not a new issue. Americans should not be experiencing such extended wait times, especially with the upcoming busy summer travel season.

I appreciate the efforts the Department has made to address this issue, including hiring additional adjudicators and support staff, and I applaud Secretary Blinken's decision to establish a task force in an attempt to speed up these wait times. However, more must be done. I encourage the Department to explore additional ways to bring the wait times down, including by improving the online passport renewal initiative—which was launched in August of last year and allowed 500,000 people to successfully apply online for passport renewal until the program was paused in early March. While the online renewal system was not perfect, as many users voiced difficulties using the site, an improved version of this initiative could offer an avenue to alleviate the excessive wait times.

As New Jerseyans begin planning for their summer vacations, I hope that you will continue to do everything in your power to bring down the wait times for the American people. My office remains committed to working with you to overcome these delays.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "R" and "M".

Robert Menendez
Chairman