

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

May 16, 2023

The Honorable Rita Bitter  
Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs  
Bureau of Consular Affairs  
U.S Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Bitter,

Our constituents rely on the efficient and predictable provision of government services to make decisions and plan their lives. We know that the State Department can face unexpected challenges just like any large institution, but when those challenges persist, our constituents deserve explanations, communication, and recompense.

Last month, Secretary Antony Blinken testified before the House Appropriations Committee about the “dramatic” increase in passport requests, noting that the State Department is “*getting 500,000 applications a week for a passport. That’s 30 to 40% above last year.*”[1] Congressional offices subsequently have been experiencing an influx of constituent requests for assistance on passports, now consisting of a disproportionate percentage of our Office’s constituent services caseload. Moreover, although the State Department issued roughly 22 million passport applications last fiscal year, it is clear that applications this year are on pace to exceed that number by 18%--suggesting that currently extended wait times could continue to increase.[2]

These processing delays and subsequent influx of requests to Congressional offices cause added stress for our constituents around long-planned travel and sometimes require them to pay additional money for expedited processing and/or overnight shipping fees they otherwise would not have pursued. Meanwhile, Congressional offices are having to dedicate additional time and resources that could be devoted to other constituent service demands.

We understand that passport processing challenges have coincided with the beta-test rollout of the Online Passport Renewal (OPR) system. We applaud the State Department’s efforts to streamline and improve response timing for our constituents seeking to renew their passports online, but questions remain regarding how the OPR system has been implemented, how this system was communicated to our constituents, and the level of oversight it has received from the State Department.

Finally, we ask that the State Department improve its internal communications among passport agencies, as well as external communications to Congressional offices, and most importantly, to our constituents, about efficiently navigating passport processing challenges. Moreover, our constituents deserve clearer communication about current estimated turnaround times, both at the application stage and while their application is in process, if their estimated receipt time changes. In addition, our Congressional offices and our constituents need to receive the same information

and guidance about what services are and are not available. Congressional offices are repeatedly experiencing instances where our constituents report that State's Passport Offices gave constituents expectations of our Congressional Offices' ability to assist them that conflicted with the guidance that State has provided to our Offices, such as the timelines we must follow in order to submit appointment requests.

To help Congress understand the current passport delays, please provide answers to the following questions:

1. How many new passport applications has the State Department received since January 1, 2023?
2. How many passport renewal applications has the State Department received since January 1, 2023?
3. How many new passport applications has the State Department processed since January 1, 2023?
4. How many passport renewals has the State Department processed since January 1, 2023?
5. How many new passport applications are currently in the State Department's queue to be processed?
6. How many passport renewal applications are currently in the State Department's queue to be processed?
7. How is passport application workload distributed/assigned to different passport offices around the country?
8. How does State address errors made in its passport processing? For instance, when application materials are lost, constituents receive the wrong passport, or there are delays or lack of clarity in notifying applicants of errors in their applications?
9. How does State address instances in which it is unable to meet its predicted timeline to applicants, which may necessitate them to pay additional overnight shipping charges?
  - a. Would State consider issuing refunds to applicants who paid for expedited shipping but did not receive their passport within the promised timeline?
10. Has State created a process for assisting applicants if it loses the applicant's identifying documentation (birth certificates, naturalization certificates etc)? If not, why?
11. How was the option to opt-in to OPR presented to applicants?
  - a. Was it made clear that the system was in Beta-testing?

- b. Were the potential risks of opting-in to OPR, such as longer processing times, errors, or lack of access to human assistance, made clear to applicants?
- 12. Our offices have heard reports of OPR-related delays dating back to November, 2022.
  - b. Does State have a procedure for manual human intervention in instances where errors with the automated OPR system resulted in longer processing times? If not, why?
  - c. Does State believe the OPR system would benefit from a manual intervention process in the case of persistent delays? If not, why? If so, has one been implemented? If not, why?
- 13. What are the metrics State is using to evaluate the performance of OPR? How is OPR performing on those metrics?
- 14. How does State currently view the future of OPR?
- 15. How has State decided what information to share with the general public about the passport delays?
- 16. Has State identified problems with how different Passport Offices share information about the status of an applicant's passport?
  - a. If so, what is State's plan to improve coordination between Offices?
- 17. How has State developed its messaging to the public about what Congressional Offices can provide to their constituents in terms of passport services?
- 18. How is State prioritizing the scheduling of limited counter appointments at passport agencies across the country, including for life-or-death emergencies and Congressional requests?
  - a. Do you have a plan to increase the number of available in-person appointments at Passport Offices in the future?
- 19: Please provide a timeline for the return of processing times to levels seen before the current spike in passport demand.
- 20: Please identify specific resources or support from Congress that will either alleviate the current backlog or prevent future backlogs.

We are grateful for your attention to these issues on behalf of our constituents.

Sincerely,



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Nikema Williams  
Member of Congress



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Jasmine Crockett  
Member of Congress



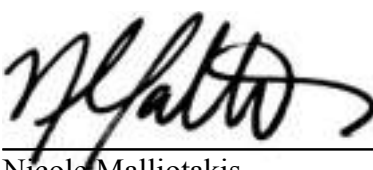
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María Elvira Salazar  
Member of Congress



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Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress



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Nicole Malliotakis  
Member of Congress



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Lisa Blunt Rochester  
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Sydney Kamlager-Dove  
Member of Congress



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Colin Z. Allred  
Member of Congress



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Dan Crenshaw  
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Joyce Beatty  
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Patrick K. Ryan  
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Scott DesJarlais, M.D.  
Member of Congress



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Greg Landsman  
Member of Congress



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Yvette D. Clarke  
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Pete Stauber  
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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
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Lauren Boebert  
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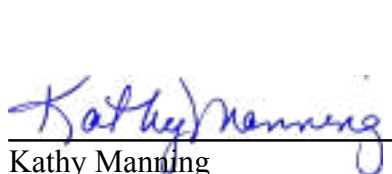
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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



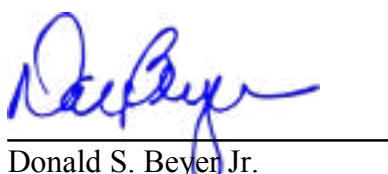
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Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



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Kathy Manning  
Member of Congress



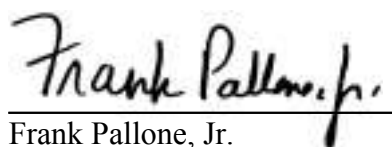
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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



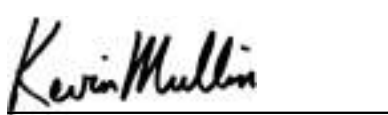
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French Hill  
Member of Congress



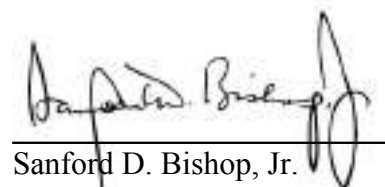
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Frank Pallone, Jr.  
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Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.  
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Lori Chavez-DeRemer  
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Katie Porter  
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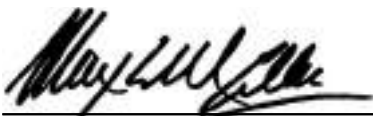
Dwight Evans  
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Elise M. Stefanik  
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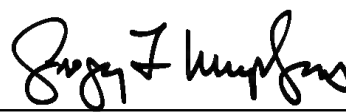
Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.  
Member of Congress



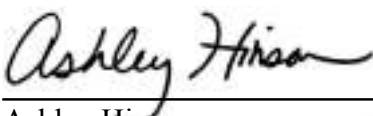
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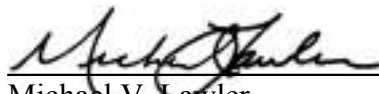
Steve Cohen  
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Joseph D. Morelle  
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Jared Huffman  
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Michael Guest  
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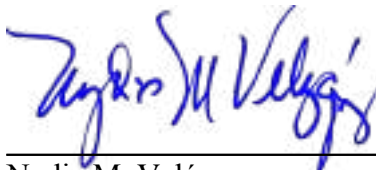
Greg Stanton  
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Earl L. "Buddy" Carter  
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Rashida Tlaib  
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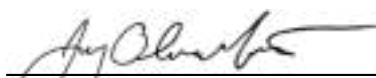
Nydia M. Velázquez  
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James P. McGovern  
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Jay Obernolte  
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Vicente Gonzalez  
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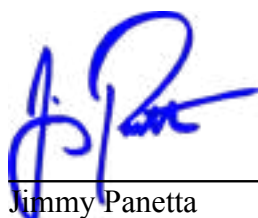
Bonnie Watson Coleman  
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Andy Harris, M.D.  
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Grace F. Napolitano  
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Nancy Mace  
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Josh Gottheimer  
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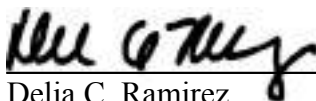
Michael R. Turner  
Member of Congress



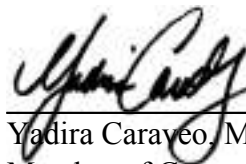
Ed Case  
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Daniel T. Kildee  
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Delia C. Ramirez  
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Yadira Caraveo, M.D.  
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Bradley Scott Schneider  
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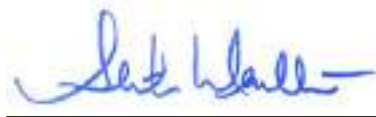
Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.  
Member of Congress



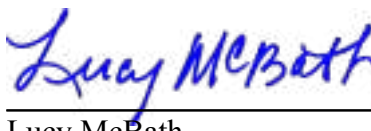
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Monica De La Cruz  
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Seth Moulton  
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Lucy McBath  
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David J. Trone  
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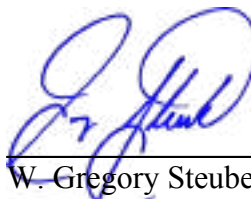
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Lloyd Smucker  
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Rudy Yakym III  
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W. Gregory Steube  
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Jim Tokuda  
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Josh Harder  
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Bill Foster  
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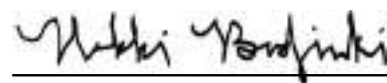
Angie Craig  
Member of Congress



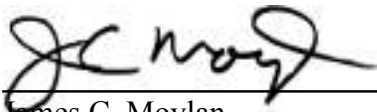
Donald M. Payne, Jr.  
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Frederica S. Wilson  
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Nikki Budzinski  
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James C. Moylan  
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Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



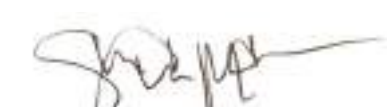
Michael T. McCaul  
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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



Kevin Kiley  
Member of Congress



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick  
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver, II  
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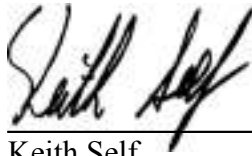
Andy Kim  
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky  
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Robin L. Kelly  
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Keith Self  
Member of Congress



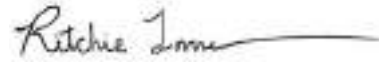
John R. Carter  
Member of Congress



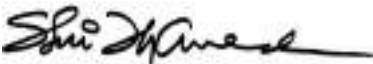
Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres  
Member of Congress



Shri Thanedar  
Member of Congress



Sam Graves  
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



Valerie P. Foushee  
Member of Congress



Charles J. "Chuck"  
Fleischmann  
Member of Congress



Brad Finstad  
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa  
Member of Congress



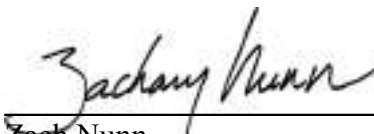
Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress



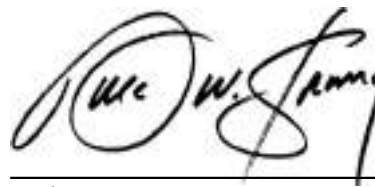
Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress



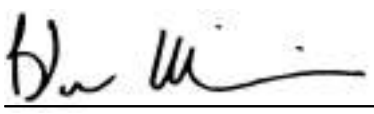
Zach Nunn  
Member of Congress



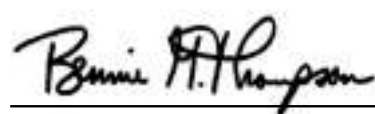
Dale W. Strong  
Member of Congress



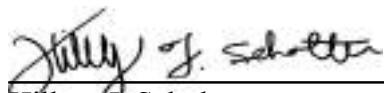
Tom McClintock  
Member of Congress



Brandon Williams  
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress



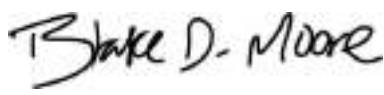
Hillary J. Scholten  
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Dan Newhouse  
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Donald Norcross  
Member of Congress



Blake D. Moore  
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Melanie Stansbury  
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress



John Garamendi  
Member of Congress



C. Scott Franklin  
Member of Congress



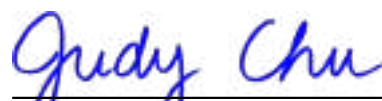
Jim Costa  
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle  
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Adam B. Schiff  
Member of Congress



Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



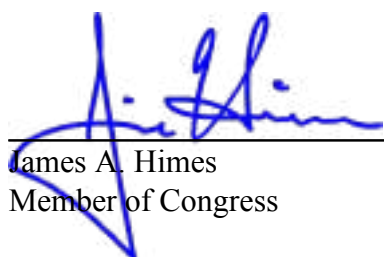
John H. Rutherford  
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Juan Ciscomani  
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Lizzie Fletcher  
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James A. Himes  
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John James  
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Jared Moskowitz  
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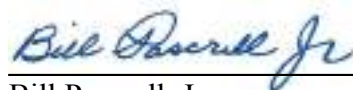
Cori Bush  
Member of Congress



Michael Cloud  
Member of Congress



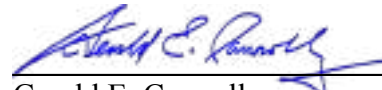
Ami Bera, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas  
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress



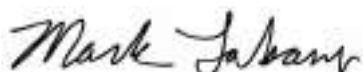
Madeleine Dean  
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Mark Takano  
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Jefferson Van Drew  
Member of Congress



Eric A. "Rick" Crawford  
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Daniel Webster  
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Gus M. Bilirakis  
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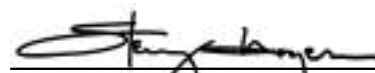
Marcus J. Molinaro  
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Cory Mills  
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Anna G. Eshoo  
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Steny H. Hoyer  
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Mike Rogers  
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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
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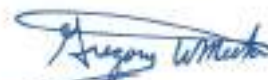
Grace Meng  
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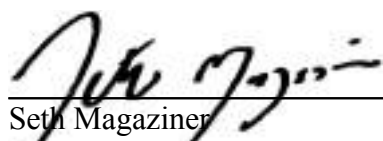
Lori Trahan  
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David Kustoff  
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Gregory W. Meeks  
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Seth Magaziner  
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William R. Timmons, IV  
Member of Congress



Patrick T. McHenry  
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Chrissy Houlahan  
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Sheila Jackson Lee  
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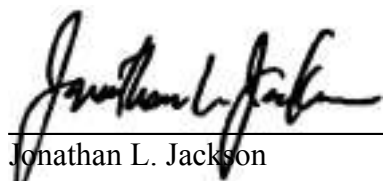
Chuck Edwards  
Member of Congress



Randy Feenstra  
Member of Congress



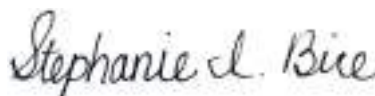
Marilyn Strickland  
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Jonathan L. Jackson  
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John P. Sarbanes  
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Stephanie Bice  
Member of Congress



Donald G. Davis  
Member of Congress



Brett Guthrie  
Member of Congress



Richard Hudson  
Member of Congress



Mikie Sherrill  
Member of Congress



Harriet M. Hageman  
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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress



Darren Soto  
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Summer Lee  
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Shontel M. Brown  
Member of Congress



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress



Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress



Ken Calvert  
Member of Congress



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Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



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Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress