March 18, 2024

The Honorable Darrell Issa
2108 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jim Costa
2081 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Issa and Costa:

On behalf of the U.S. Travel Association (U.S. Travel), which represents all segments of America's travel industry, I am writing to express our strong support for H.R. 6610, the Passport System Reform and Backlog Prevention Act, which is a bipartisan measure that calls for the modernization of the State Department's passport processing capabilities. H.R. 6610 provides a much-needed framework for meeting the Department's commitment to improve efficiency, security, and customer experience within the passport application process.
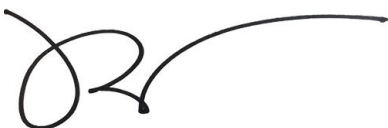
As you know, America's travel industry plays a vital role in our nation's economy, contributing significantly to revenue generation and job creation across all 50 states and territories. U.S. Travel's mission is to increase travel to and within the United States, and H.R. 6610 aligns with that mission. As the travel sector continues to recover from the pandemic, there is an urgent need to modernize that travel experience, improve travel IT infrastructure, and position the Department to meet increased demand for passports. In 2022 and 2023, the Department received a record-breaking number of passport applications driven by the surge in U.S. traveler demand for international trips, thereby causing a massive and persistent backlog in average processing times.

While there has been modest improvement in passport processing times since last summer, more needs to be done to bring about sustained progress. Significant improvements in both passport and visa processing times can be readily achieved through the long-overdue modernization of the Bureau of Consular Affairs' outdated IT systems. The legacy systems relied upon by Consular Affairs have significantly hindered the agency's ability to keep pace with demand and disrupted the travel experiences of millions of Americans each year. Accordingly, the modernization of IT infrastructure should be treated as a critical priority for delivering streamlined customer experience for passport and visa applicants, while ensuring the accuracy and security of those functions.

This modernization initiative also aligns with broader efforts to promote international travel and strengthen diplomatic relations. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, it is essential for the United States to maintain a robust and efficient passport system that facilitates the movement of people and fosters a travel sector that drives economic growth and job creation.

The U.S. Travel Association commends your bipartisan leadership in introducing H.R. 6610 and looks forward to working alongside you to advocate for its passage.

Sincerely,

Tori Emerson Barnes
Executive Vice President
Public Affairs and Policy