

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 6610

To provide for the modernization of the passport issuance process, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DECEMBER 6, 2023

Mr. ISSA (for himself and Ms. SALAZAR) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

A BILL

To provide for the modernization of the passport issuance process, 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 AND TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) **SHORT TITLE.**—This Act may be cited as the
5 “Passport System Reform and Backlog Prevention Act”.

6 (b) **TABLE OF CONTENTS.**—The table of contents for
7 this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title and table of contents.

Sec. 2. Findings.

Sec. 3. Sense of Congress.

Sec. 4. Standards for passport issuance process.

Sec. 5. Emergency hiring authorities for consular services.

Sec. 6. Enhanced information technology solutions to improve the passport issuance process.

Sec. 7. Research on commercially available information technology solutions.
Sec. 8. GAO report.
Sec. 9. Definitions.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds the following:

3 (1) Following the COVID–19 pandemic, the
4 United States experienced a major backlog of pass-
5 port applications resulting in passport processing
6 wait times of up to 13 weeks, exclusive of shipping
7 times.

8 (2) The backlog resulted in wait times which
9 are an extreme outlier among developed countries
10 with widely accepted passports, while United States
11 pre-pandemic processing times of six to eight weeks
12 are also among the slowest.

13 (3) Over the past several years, the Bureau has
14 experienced repeated delays in its attempts to mod-
15 ernize and technologize the passport issuance proc-
16 ess.

17 (4) The adoption of additional commercially
18 available information technology solutions at several
19 stages of the passport issuance process would greatly
20 enhance and accelerate such process.

21 (5) The United States passport is a widely rec-
22 ognized and trusted identity and travel document
23 that represents a key element of a United States
24 citizen’s identity records.

1 **SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

2 It is the sense of Congress that—

3 (1) as a routine matter, an adult who has sub-
4 mitted a routine new or renewal passport application
5 should be reliably able to expect that such applica-
6 tion adjudicated will be adjudicated by the Bureau,
7 at a reasonable cost, in no longer than 30 days; and

8 (2) the Bureau should take every effort and use
9 every available technology and best practice to pro-
10 tect the integrity of the passport issuance process,
11 the privacy of passport holders, and the efficiency of
12 processing passport issuance requests.

13 **SEC. 4. STANDARDS FOR PASSPORT ISSUANCE PROCESS.**

14 Upon implementation of the information technology
15 solutions required pursuant to section 6, in administering
16 the passport issuance process, the Assistant Secretary
17 shall evaluate the performance of such process against the
18 following criteria:

19 (1) To maintain a service standard of proe-
20 cessing a routine new or renewal adult passport appli-
21 cation from document submission until mailing of
22 final documents in not longer than 30 days.

23 (2) To maintain affordable passport fees.

24 (3) To ensure world-class technical, security,
25 and cybersecurity standards for United States pass-
26 ports and the passport issuance process.

1 (4) To minimize downtime for the travel docu-
2 ment issuance system.

3 (5) To achieve a near-zero suspense rate result-
4 ing from typographical, clerical, or picture-based er-
5 rors.

6 (6) To provide a streamlined customer experi-
7 ence for passport applicants.

8 (7) To provide reasonably convenient passport
9 services to United States citizens and nationals liv-
10 ing a significant distance from a passport agency,
11 particularly residents in a significant population cen-
12 ter more than a 5-hour drive from a passport agen-
13 cy.

14 **SEC. 5. EMERGENCY HIRING AUTHORITIES FOR CONSULAR**
15 **SERVICES.**

16 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary is authorized to
17 employ a limited number of personal services contractors
18 for employment in the United States in order to meet exi-
19 gent needs of the Bureau.

20 (b) **AUTHORITY IN ADDITION TO EXISTING AU-**
21 **THORITIES.**—The authority described in subsection (a) is
22 in addition to any existing authorities to enter into con-
23 tracts with such personal services contractors.

24 (c) **EMPLOYING AND ALLOCATION OF PERSONNEL.**—
25 To meet the requirements described in subsection (a) and

1 subject to the requirements of subsection (b), the Sec-
2 retary may—

3 (1) employ a total of up to 100 personal serv-
4 ices contractors at any given time in each of the fis-
5 cal years 2024, 2025, and 2026;

6 (2) allocate personal services contractors to
7 other elements of the Department in order to back-
8 fill personnel who have been assigned to work in the
9 Bureau, except that not more than 20 such contrac-
10 tors may be assigned to any one element of the De-
11 partment other than the Bureau; and

12 (3) allocate personal services contractors to ele-
13 ments of the Department without regard to the
14 sources of funding such element relies on to com-
15 pensate individuals.

16 (d) LIMITATION.—Employment authorized by this
17 section may not exceed 2 calendar years.

18 (e) PERSONAL SERVICES CONTRACTORS.—Personal
19 services contractors hired pursuant to this section shall
20 be considered as employees of the Department of State
21 for the purposes of the first section of the Act entitled
22 “An Act to regulate the issue and validity of passports,
23 and for other purposes”, approved July 3, 1926 (22
24 U.S.C. 211a).

25 (f) NOTIFICATION AND REPORTING TO CONGRESS.—

1 (1) NOTIFICATION.—At least 15 days prior to
2 the exercise of the authority of this section, the Sec-
3 retary shall notify the appropriate congressional
4 committees of the number of personal services con-
5 tractors being employed, the expected length of em-
6 ployment, the bureaus in which such contractors are
7 being employed, the purpose for using personal serv-
8 ices contractors, and the justification, including the
9 exigent circumstances requiring such use.

10 (2) ANNUAL REPORTING.—Not later than 60
11 days after the end of each fiscal year specified in
12 subsection (c)(1), the Secretary shall submit to the
13 appropriate congressional committees a report that
14 contains the matters described in paragraph (1) with
15 respect to such fiscal year.

16 **SEC. 6. ENHANCED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SOLU-**
17 **TIONS TO IMPROVE THE PASSPORT**
18 **ISSUANCE PROCESS.**

19 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Assistant Secretary, in con-
20 sultation with the Chief Information Officer, shall imple-
21 ment the information technology solutions described in
22 subsection (b) in accordance with the timelines described
23 in such subsection.

24 (b) ENHANCED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SOLU-
25 TIONS AND TIMELINES DESCRIBED.—The enhanced infor-

1 mation technology solutions and timelines described in this
2 subsection are the following:

3 (1)(A) Not later than 60 days after the date of
4 the enactment of this Act, the Chief Information Of-
5 ficer shall award a contract or expand an existing
6 contract to provide a digital dashboard to provide
7 congressional offices with the ability to track the
8 status of individual passport applications being han-
9 dled as casework by such offices.

10 (B) Not later than 180 days after such date of
11 enactment, the Chief Information Officer shall com-
12 plete implementation of the dashboard described in
13 subparagraph (A).

14 (2)(A) Not later than one year after the date
15 of the enactment of this Act, the Assistant Sec-
16 retary, in consultation with the Chief Information
17 Officer, shall award a contract for the establishment
18 and maintenance of—

19 (i) a service to provide to passport appli-
20 cants automated, voluntary proactive commu-
21 nications, by email or text message, for each
22 progress point in the passport issuance process,
23 and for the notification of application errors,
24 and delivery of mail tracking numbers, and re-
25 minders of renewal eligibility;

1 (ii) a mobile application to allow for the
2 centralization of applicant communication with
3 the Department, including document submis-
4 sion, application status tracking, virtual ap-
5 pointments, access to the notification of appli-
6 cation errors described in clause (i), and allow-
7 ing for passport holders to receive messages
8 from the Department and communicate emer-
9 gencies to the Department.

10 (B) The services described in subparagraph (A)
11 shall be offered to applicants on an opt-in basis only
12 and data gained as a result of such opt-in shall not
13 be transferred to any third party.

14 (C) With respect to the service described in
15 clause (A)(i), the Secretary shall provide separate
16 options to opt-in to email and text message notifica-
17 tion, as well as separate options to opt-in to proc-
18 essing-related notifications and renewal eligibility no-
19 tifications.

20 (D) As a condition for awarding the contracts
21 described in subparagraph (A), the awardee shall
22 demonstrate that it can begin tests on the solution
23 within one year of the award of the contract and
24 complete implementation, including bug fixes, cyber-
25 security audits, and customer service testing, not

1 later than three years from the award of the con-
2 tract.

3 (3)(A) Not later than one year after the date
4 of the enactment of this Act, the Assistant Sec-
5 retary, in consultation with the Chief Information
6 Officer, shall award a contract or contracts for the
7 expansion and maintenance of the online passport
8 renewal system to be able to accommodate both rou-
9 tine first-time adult applications and renewal adult
10 passport applications.

11 (B) The contracts awarded pursuant to sub-
12 paragraph (A) shall cover the following services:

13 (i) A customer-friendly internet website or
14 portal to facilitate internet-based submission of
15 adult passport applications.

16 (ii) Necessary remote document
17 verification tools and infrastructure, to allow
18 for a passport transaction to be completed en-
19 tirely remotely.

20 (iii) Necessary information technology in-
21 frastructure not already maintained by the De-
22 partment.

23 (C) The expansion of the online passport re-
24 newal system and associated systems shall, upon full
25 implementation, be able to accommodate sufficient

1 volume to process 100 percent of expected routine
2 new and renewal adult passport applications for the
3 five years following the date on which the system is
4 fully implemented.

5 (D)(i) If applicable, not later than two years
6 after the date of the enactment of this Act, services
7 contracted pursuant to subparagraph (A) shall be
8 carried out on a pilot basis.

9 (ii) Not later than three years after such date
10 of enactment, services contracted pursuant to sub-
11 paragraph (A) shall be able to accommodate 25 per-
12 cent of new and renewal adult passport applications.

13 (iii) Not later than four years after such date
14 of enactment, services contracted pursuant to sub-
15 paragraph (A) shall be fully implemented.

16 (iv) In awarding contracts pursuant to subpara-
17 graph (A), the Secretary shall only consider pro-
18 posals that can reasonably be expected to meet the
19 timelines described in this subparagraph.

20 (E) Nothing in this paragraph shall be con-
21 strued as authorization to terminate the acceptance
22 of paper-based passport applications.

23 (4)(A) not later than 180 days after the date
24 of the enactment of this Act, the Chief Information
25 Officer, in coordination with the Assistant Secretary,

1 shall award a contract or contracts for the provision
2 of rules-based tools to screen online passport renewal
3 applications in which no biographical information
4 was changed for citizenship, identity, and entitle-
5 ment against internal and commercial databases.

6 (B) The tools described in subparagraph (A)
7 shall be fully operational within one year of the
8 award of the contract.

9 (C) The Chief Information Officer shall ensure
10 that the use of the tools do not provide vectors for
11 cyberattack.

12 (D) The Assistant Secretary shall ensure that
13 the tools described in subparagraph (A) are imple-
14 mented consistent with the maintenance of passport
15 integrity standards.

16 (E) For purposes of using the tools described in
17 subparagraph (A), the requirement that a passport
18 be issued by the personnel described in the first sec-
19 tion of the Act entitled “An Act to regulate the issue
20 and validity of passports, and for other purposes”,
21 approved July 3, 1926 (22 U.S.C. 211a), shall be
22 satisfied provided that such personnel oversee the
23 tools described in such subparagraph consistent with
24 the requirements in subparagraph (D).

25 (c) ROLE OF CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Chief Information Offi-
2 cer’s approval shall be required before the Assistant
3 Secretary awards a contract pursuant to this sec-
4 tion.

5 (2) RELATING TO SYSTEMS.—With respect to
6 the contracting and implementation of the systems
7 described in subsection (b), the Chief Information
8 Officer shall have—

9 (A) final decision making authority on the
10 technical feasibility and specifications, cyberse-
11 curity requirements, compatibility with existing
12 Department information technology infrastruc-
13 ture, and the feasibility of timelines from a
14 technical standpoint; and

15 (B) final approval of all technical matters
16 before full implementation.

17 (3) EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS.—In selecting
18 the services described in subsection (b), the Chief
19 Information Officer shall include in the criteria for
20 selection—

21 (A) the ability of the system to maintain
22 security, including the cybersecurity, standards
23 appropriate to the United States passport and
24 to protect personally identifiable information;

1 (B) scalability to accommodate current and
2 future passport demand; and

3 (C) long-term viability and upgradability.

4 (d) ACTION PLAN.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
6 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the As-
7 sistant Secretary and the Chief Information Officer
8 shall submit to the appropriate congressional com-
9 mittees an action plan on how the Bureau plans to
10 complete the modernizations described in this section
11 and complete other ongoing modernizations of the
12 passport issuance process.

13 (2) ELEMENTS.—The action plan required by
14 paragraph (1) shall include the following elements:

15 (A) The implementation progress for the
16 information technology solutions described in
17 subsection (b).

18 (B) The specific implementation steps for
19 the solutions described in subsection (b) that
20 Bureau of Consular Affairs and the Bureau of
21 Information Resource Management will take, in
22 conjunction with contract awardees, to meet the
23 timelines described in subsection (b).

1 (C) The expected cost and timeline for im-
2 plementation of the information technology so-
3 lutions described in subsection (b).

4 (D) An evaluation of the information tech-
5 nology solutions described in subsection (b) to
6 determine whether the full implementation of
7 such solutions will require additional funding or
8 authorities, including budget estimates and a
9 description of such authorities, as appropriate.

10 (E) Steps, processes, and technologies the
11 Chief Information Officer intends to use to en-
12 sure world-class cybersecurity standards for
13 protection of passport applicant data and the
14 passport issuance process infrastructure, par-
15 ticularly such infrastructure involved in adju-
16 dication of passport applications.

17 (F) A staffing plan for the four years be-
18 ginning on the first day of the month during
19 which the action plan will be submitted describ-
20 ing the expected staffing needs of the Bureau
21 for the passport issuance process.

22 (G) Other specific planned steps that the
23 Bureau will take to achieve the criteria de-
24 scribed in section 4.

1 (e) ONGOING REPORTING.—Not later than 90 days
2 after the interim plan described in subsection (d), and
3 quarterly thereafter until such time as the Bureau has
4 completed implementation of the items described in sub-
5 section (b), the Assistant Secretary, in consultation with
6 the Chief Information Officer, shall submit to the appro-
7 priate congressional committees a report on the following:

8 (1) Progress on each item described in sub-
9 section (b).

10 (2) Additional modernizations the Bureau in-
11 tends to adopt.

12 (3) Changes in the cost for implementation of
13 the steps described in the action plan, if applicable.

14 (f) FORM.—The plans and report required by this
15 section shall be submitted in an unclassified form and may
16 include classified a annex, if necessary.

17 **SEC. 7. RESEARCH ON COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE INFOR-**
18 **MATION TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS.**

19 (a) IN GENERAL.—In conducting the review required
20 by subsection (a), the Chief Information Officer shall so-
21 licit the private sector for proposals to identify commer-
22 cially available technologies that may be adopted by the
23 Bureau to advance the criteria described in section 4.

24 (b) REQUIREMENTS.—Not later than 60 days after
25 the date of the enactment of this Act, in furtherance of

1 the requirement under subsection (a), the Chief Informa-
2 tion Officer shall—

3 (1) publish such solicitation and the process for
4 responding to the solicitation in the Federal Register
5 and notify the appropriate congressional committees
6 thereof;

7 (2) solicit proposals for information technology
8 services that improve any aspect of the passport
9 issuance process, including the online passport re-
10 newal system, by allowing it to meet one or more of
11 the criteria described in section 4; and

12 (3) establish a team, in cooperation with the
13 Assistant Secretary, of appropriate Department em-
14 ployees and contractors to serve as the point of con-
15 tact for, and to consult on policy, legal, and tech-
16 nical aspects of the passport issuance process with
17 entities considering submitting a proposal.

18 (c) EVALUATION.—For each such proposal, the Chief
19 Information Officer shall evaluate the cost, security, and
20 likely benefits, including benefits to customer satisfaction,
21 digitization, and adjudication streamlining.

22 (d) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this sec-
23 tion may be construed as an offer to procure services pro-
24 posed to the Bureau pursuant to the solicitation of pro-

1 posals required by paragraph (1) or as a guarantee of a
2 contract for such services.

3 (e) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
4 of the enactment of this Act, the Chief Information Offi-
5 cer, in coordination with the Assistant Secretary, shall
6 submit to the appropriate congressional committees a re-
7 port—

8 (1) describing opportunities to leverage the pri-
9 vate sector and commercially available technologies
10 to streamline, expedite, or otherwise enhance the
11 passport issuance process; and

12 (2) containing a summary of each proposal
13 made pursuant to this section and whether the Sec-
14 retary intends to adopt each proposal.

15 **SEC. 8. GAO REPORT.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 30 days after the
17 date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General
18 of the United States shall initiate a comprehensive review
19 of the passport issuance process designed to enable the
20 Bureau to better meet the criteria described in section 4
21 by identifying—

22 (1) weaknesses within such process;

23 (2) additional opportunities to leverage commer-
24 cially available technologies and global best prac-
25 tices;

1 (3) opportunities to streamline, expedite, and
2 otherwise enhance such process.

3 (b) ELEMENTS.—The review required by subsection
4 (a) shall include the following elements:

5 (1) A technical audit of the Travel Document
6 Issuance System (TDIS) and other passport-
7 issuance information technology systems that seeks
8 to identify—

9 (A) aspects of the systems, including sys-
10 tem architecture, that may impact its perform-
11 ance, scalability, and uptime;

12 (B) single points of failure within the sys-
13 tems;

14 (C) potential areas where commercially
15 available information technology solutions could
16 be employed to modernize the systems, and the
17 likely costs to the Department of acquiring and
18 implementing such solutions; and

19 (D) aspects, including staffing, that may
20 impact the speed of resolving technical issues
21 within the systems.

22 (2) An evaluation of the importance of each
23 human aspect of the passport issuance process to de-
24 termine whether such aspects can be replaced by se-
25 cure digital processes.

1 (3) Based on consultations conducted pursuant
2 to subsection (c), a discussion of global best prac-
3 tices and standards, including benchmarks for appli-
4 cation fees and processing times for passport
5 issuance.

6 (4) Measures the Comptroller believes the Bu-
7 reau could take to reduce the cost of the passport
8 issuance process or of application fees or surcharges.

9 (5) An analysis of potential partnerships with
10 other Federal agencies, including the Department of
11 Homeland Security and its component agencies, the
12 Social Security Administration, and the United
13 States Postal Service, which could support the iden-
14 tity verification and resolution component of the
15 passport issuance process.

16 (6) Whether partnerships with the departments
17 of motor vehicles of the several States to collect and
18 electronically submit passport applications, including
19 pictures, fees, and digital copies of identity docu-
20 ments, to the Bureau would be a viable and secure
21 method of passport application submission.

22 (7) An evaluation of other United States Gov-
23 ernment holdings, including biometric databases,
24 that could be queried to support the Department's
25 identity resolution processes to increase the security

1 of the identity verification and resolution component
2 of the passport issuance process.

3 (c) RESEARCH ON GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES.—In
4 conducting the review required by subsection (a), the
5 Comptroller shall consult with the Governments of the Re-
6 public of Korea and India and with no fewer than four
7 other foreign governments to ascertain global best prac-
8 tices for passport processing and to identify processes, ap-
9 proaches, and technologies that may be useful to inform
10 the modernization of the passport issuance process.

11 (d) SUBMISSION.—Upon completion of the review re-
12 quired by subsection (a), the Comptroller shall submit to
13 the appropriate congressional committees, to the Assistant
14 Secretary, and to the Chief Information Officer a report
15 that contains the results of the review.

16 (e) RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION RE-
17 PORT.—Not later than 90 days after the date on which
18 the report required by subsection (d) is submitted, and
19 quarterly thereafter, the Assistant Secretary and the Chief
20 Information Officer shall submit to the appropriate con-
21 gressional committees a report on progress toward resolu-
22 tion of each recommendation made in the report required
23 by subsection (d) and planned steps that will be taken to
24 resolve each recommendation over the next quarter.

1 **SEC. 9. DEFINITIONS.**

2 In this Act—

3 (1) the term “appropriate congressional com-
4 mittees” means—

5 (A) the Committee on Foreign Affairs and
6 the Committee on Appropriations of the House
7 of Representatives; and

8 (B) the Committee on Foreign Relations
9 and the Committee on Appropriations of the
10 Senate;

11 (2) the term “Assistant Secretary” means the
12 Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs;

13 (3) the term “Bureau” means the Bureau of
14 Consular Affairs of the Department;

15 (4) the term “Chief Information Officer” means
16 the Chief Information Officer of the Bureau;

17 (5) except as otherwise provided, the term “De-
18 partment” means the Department of State;

19 (6) the term “passport issuance process”—

20 (A) means all steps of passport issuance
21 for a new passport or renewal of a passport, as
22 appropriate, from the applicant’s submission of
23 documents through document processing and
24 application adjudication to mailing of printed
25 passports; and

26 (B) includes—

1 (i) the passport application submis-
2 sion, which includes—

3 (I) the portion of the passport
4 issuance process from and including
5 passport acceptance by a passport ac-
6 ceptance agent until documents are
7 received by the Department; and

8 (II) payment processing and mail
9 shipping times; and

10 (ii) the passport application proc-
11 essing, which includes the portion of the
12 passport issuance process from the recep-
13 tion of completed applications and their
14 distribution to passport agencies for adju-
15 dication until finished passports and appli-
16 cation documents are mailed to applicants;
17 and

18 (7) the term “Secretary” means the Secretary
19 of State.

○