

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 6610

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 20, 2024

Received; read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

AN ACT

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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

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

4 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for
5 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. Enhanced information technology solutions to improve the passport
issuance process.
- Sec. 6. Research on commercially available information technology solutions.
- Sec. 7. GAO Report.
- Sec. 8. Rule of construction.
- Sec. 9. Definitions.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the
9 United States experienced a major backlog of pass-
10 port applications and passport processing wait times
11 of up to 13 weeks, exclusive of shipping times.

12 (2) Over the past several years, the Department
13 has experienced repeated delays in its attempts to
14 modernize the passport issuance process.

15 (3) The adoption of additional commercially
16 available information technology solutions at several
17 stages of the passport issuance process could greatly
18 enhance and accelerate such process.

19 (4) The United States passport is a widely rec-
20 ognized and trusted identity and travel document

1 that is of tremendous importance to its bearer
2 around the globe.

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

4 It is the sense of Congress that—

5 (1) as a routine matter, an adult who has sub-
6 mitted a routine new or renewal passport application
7 should be reliably able to expect that such applica-
8 tion will be adjudicated by the Department, at a rea-
9 sonable cost, in a time frame which is conducive to
10 international travel;

11 (2) the Department should seek to further mod-
12 ernize and streamline the passport issuance process
13 to enable a decrease in processing times below pre-
14 pandemic levels of six-to-eight weeks, specifically for
15 routine adult passport renewals with respect to
16 which the Department should seek to decrease aver-
17 age processing times to less than 30 days; and

18 (3) the Department should take all reasonable
19 steps, including the use of available technology and
20 best practices, to protect the integrity of the pass-
21 port issuance process, the privacy of passport hold-
22 ers, and the efficiency of processing passport
23 issuance requests.

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

2 In administering and modernizing the passport
3 issuance process, the Assistant Secretary shall evaluate
4 the performance of such process against the following cri-
5 teria:

6 (1) To maintain a service standard of proc-
7 essing a routine new or renewal adult passport appli-
8 cation from document submission until mailing of
9 final documents in an expeditious and reliable time-
10 frame.

11 (2) To maintain affordable passport fees and
12 surcharges.

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

16 (4) To minimize downtime for the Travel Docu-
17 ment Issuance System.

18 (5) To minimize the suspense rate resulting
19 from typographical, clerical, or picture-based errors,
20 including by enabling such suspensions to be re-
21 solved electronically.

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

24 (7) To provide reasonably convenient passport
25 services to United States citizens and nationals liv-
26 ing a significant distance from a passport agency,

1 particularly residents in a significant population cen-
2 ter more than a 5-hour drive from a passport agen-
3 cy.

4 **SEC. 5. ENHANCED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SOLU-**
5 **TIONS TO IMPROVE THE PASSPORT**
6 **ISSUANCE PROCESS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Assistant Secretary, in con-
8 sultation with the Chief Information Officer, shall imple-
9 ment the information technology solutions described in
10 subsection (b) in accordance with the timelines described
11 in such subsection.

12 (b) ENHANCED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SOLU-
13 TIONS AND TIMELINES DESCRIBED.—The enhanced infor-
14 mation technology solutions and timelines described in this
15 subsection are the following:

16 (1) Not later than 2 years after the date of the
17 enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary, in
18 consultation with the Chief Information Officer,
19 shall, including if necessary through the awarding of
20 a contract or expanding an existing, establish a tool
21 to enable congressional offices to monitor the status
22 of individual passport applications being handled as
23 casework by such offices.

24 (2)(A) Not later than 2 years after the date of
25 the enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary,

1 in consultation with the Chief Information Officer,
2 shall take all reasonable steps, including if necessary
3 the awarding of a contract for the establishment and
4 ongoing maintenance of a service to provide to pass-
5 port applicants automated, voluntary proactive com-
6 munications, by email or text message, for each
7 progress point in the passport issuance process, and
8 for the notification of application errors, and deliv-
9 ery of mail tracking numbers, and reminders of re-
10 newal eligibility.

11 (B) Applicants shall be provided the choice of
12 whether to use the services described in subpara-
13 graph (A) and data gained as a result of participa-
14 tion in such services shall not be transferred to any
15 third party outside the Department or its contract
16 awardees.

17 (C) The services described in subparagraph (A)
18 shall provide separate options for email and text
19 message notification, as well as separate options for
20 processing-related notifications and renewal eligi-
21 bility notifications.

22 (3)(A) Consistent with the Bureau's moderniza-
23 tion plans and timelines, and subject to the avail-
24 ability of funds, the Assistant Secretary, in consulta-
25 tion with the Chief Information Officer, shall seek to

1 enter into a contract or contracts as appropriate, for
2 the establishment and maintenance of a mobile ap-
3 plication to allow for the centralization of applicant
4 communication with the Department, including doc-
5 ument submission, application status tracking, vir-
6 tual appointments, access to the notification of ap-
7 plication errors, and allowing for passport holders to
8 receive messages from the Department and commu-
9 nicate emergencies to the Department.

10 (B) The Assistant Secretary shall provide each
11 passport applicant with the option of whether to use
12 the mobile application described in subparagraph
13 (A) or another service of the Department.

14 (C) As a condition for awarding any contracts
15 described in subparagraph (A), the awardee shall
16 demonstrate that it can begin tests on the solution
17 within one year of the award of the contract and
18 complete implementation, including bug fixes, cyber-
19 security audits, and customer service testing, not
20 later than two years from the award of the contract.

21 (4)(A) Consistent with existing law, the Assist-
22 ant Secretary, in consultation with the Chief Infor-
23 mation Officer, shall expand the online passport re-
24 newal system, including to accommodate electronic
25 acceptance of routine first-time adult applications as

1 applicable, in addition to adult renewal applications
2 in sufficient volume to be able to accommodate most
3 applications by the date that is four years from the
4 date of enactment of this Act.

5 (B) Planning carried out to implement subpara-
6 graph (A) shall prepare the Bureau to verify appli-
7 cations without recourse to the information gained
8 through appearance in person described in section 1
9 of the Act of June 15, 1917 (22 U.S.C. 213), sub-
10 ject to any additional authorities required.

11 (C) To meet the objectives described in sub-
12 paragraphs (A) and (B), the Assistant Secretary, in
13 consultation with the Chief Information Officer,
14 shall, to the maximum extent practicable, make use
15 of commercially-available technology solutions, in-
16 cluding by seeking to enter into a contract or con-
17 tracts for the expansion and maintenance of the on-
18 line passport renewal system to accommodate the
19 functionality described in such subparagraphs.

20 (D) In expanding the online passport renewal
21 system pursuant to subparagraph (C), the following
22 services should be included or otherwise accounted
23 for:

1 (i) A customer-friendly, user-friendly inter-
2 net website or portal to facilitate internet-based
3 submission of passport applications by adults.

4 (ii) To the extent possible, remote docu-
5 ment verification tools and infrastructure, to
6 allow for a passport transaction to be completed
7 entirely remotely.

8 (iii) To the extent possible, information
9 technology infrastructure not already main-
10 tained by the Department.

11 (5)(A) The Assistant Secretary, in consultation
12 with the Chief Information Officer, shall take all
13 reasonable steps and to the maximum extent prac-
14 ticable make use of commercially-available tech-
15 nology solutions to implement additional rules-based
16 tools, including by seeking to enter into a contract
17 or contracts for such tools and their maintenance, to
18 adjudicate online passport renewal applications in
19 which no biographical information was changed for
20 citizenship, identity, and entitlement against internal
21 and commercial databases.

22 (B) The tools described in subparagraph (A)
23 shall be fully operational within 4 years of the date
24 of the enactment of this Act.

1 (C) The Chief Information Officer shall ensure
2 that the use of the tools do not make passport adju-
3 dication more vulnerable to cyberattack.

4 (D) The Assistant Secretary, in consultation
5 with the Chief Information Officer, shall ensure that
6 the tools described in subparagraph (A) are imple-
7 mented consistent with the maintenance of stand-
8 ards appropriate to ensuring the integrity of the
9 United States passport.

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

19 (c) CERTIFICATION.—In addition to other require-
20 ments in this section, not later than 30 days before the
21 Assistant Secretary begins work to procure internally any
22 of the information technology solutions described in sub-
23 section (b), the Assistant Secretary, in coordination with
24 the Chief Information Officer, shall certify to the appro-
25 priate congressional committees that—

1 (1) the reasons for procuring such service inter-
2 nally;

3 (2) the Bureau has sufficient capacity to imple-
4 ment and maintain such services; and

5 (3) the Bureau cannot procure such services for
6 significantly reduced cost externally.

7 (d) PREFERENCE.—In procuring and implementing
8 the information technology solutions described in sub-
9 section (b), preference should be given to entities with the
10 technical expertise necessary for the project and capacity
11 to deliver timely solutions.

12 (e) ROLE OF CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Chief Information Offi-
14 cer's concurrence shall be required before the Assist-
15 ant Secretary awards a contract pursuant to this
16 section.

17 (2) RELATING TO SYSTEMS.—With respect to
18 the contracting and implementation of the systems
19 described in subsection (b), the Chief Information
20 Officer shall have—

21 (A) final decision making authority on the
22 technical feasibility and specifications, cyberse-
23 curity requirements, compatibility with existing
24 Department information technology infrastruc-

1 ture, and the feasibility of timelines from a
2 technical standpoint; and

3 (B) final approval of all technical matters
4 before full implementation.

5 (3) EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS.—In selecting
6 the services described in subsection (b), the Assist-
7 ant Secretary and the Chief Information Officer
8 shall include in the criteria for selection—

9 (A) the ability of the proposal to maintain
10 security, including the cybersecurity, standards
11 appropriate to the United States passport and
12 to protect personally identifiable information;

13 (B) scalability to accommodate current and
14 future passport demand; and

15 (C) long-term viability and upgradability.

16 (f) INTERIM ACTION PLAN.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
18 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the As-
19 sistant Secretary, in consultation with the Chief In-
20 formation Officer, shall submit to the appropriate
21 congressional committees an action plan on how the
22 Bureau plans to complete the modernization de-
23 scribed in this section in conjunction with other re-
24 lated, ongoing steps to modernize the passport
25 issuance process.

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

3 (A) Progress made on implementing the
4 information technology solutions described in
5 subsection (b) within specific timelines, and ad-
6 ditional steps planned.

7 (B) The expected cost and timeline for im-
8 plementation of the information technology so-
9 lutions described in subsection (b).

10 (C) An evaluation of the information tech-
11 nology solutions described in subsection (b) to
12 determine whether the full implementation of
13 such solutions will require additional funding or
14 authorities, including budget estimates and a
15 description of such authorities, as appropriate.

16 (D) Efforts to ensure world-class cyberse-
17 curity standards for protection of passport ap-
18 plicant data and the passport issuance process
19 infrastructure, particularly such infrastructure
20 involved in adjudication of passport applica-
21 tions.

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

1 (g) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 4 years after the
2 date of the enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary,
3 in consultation with the Chief Information Officer, shall
4 submit to the appropriate congressional committees a re-
5 port on the following:

6 (1) Progress on each information technology so-
7 lution described in subsection (b).

8 (2) Additional information technology solutions
9 the Bureau intends to adopt.

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

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

15 **SEC. 6. RESEARCH ON COMMERCIALLY AVAILABLE INFOR-**
16 **MATION TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 60 days after the
18 enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary, in coordi-
19 nation with the Chief Information Officer, shall establish
20 a working group of appropriate Department employees,
21 and contractors as appropriate, to liaise with the private
22 sector for the purposes of identifying commercially avail-
23 able technologies that may be adopted by the Bureau to
24 advance the criteria described in section 4, evaluating pro-

1 posed technological solutions, and augmenting the Bu-
2 reau's ongoing modernization efforts.

3 (b) COMPOSITION.—The working group established
4 pursuant to subsection (a) shall be composed of personnel
5 who can consult on the policy, legal, and technical aspects
6 of the passport issuance process with entities that wish
7 to provide such technologies to the Department.

8 (c) PILOT PROJECTS.—Not later than 180 days after
9 the date of the enactment of this Act, the working group
10 established pursuant to subsection (a) should consider pi-
11 loting not fewer than three commercial information tech-
12 nology systems with potential to accelerate the passport
13 renewal process, reduce the backlog of requests, and
14 backup legacy systems with cloud-based software solu-
15 tions.

16 (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
17 of the enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary, in
18 coordination with the Chief Information Officer, shall sub-
19 mit to the appropriate congressional committees a re-
20 port—

21 (1) describing the usefulness of the working
22 group to the Department's ongoing modernization
23 efforts and its reception by private sector actors;

24 (2) containing a summary of each proposal
25 made to the working group pursuant to this section

1 and whether the Secretary intends to adopt each
2 proposal;

3 (3) providing recommendations to scale success-
4 ful solutions.

5 **SEC. 7. GAO REPORT.**

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of the
7 United States shall conduct a comprehensive review of the
8 passport issuance process, including—

9 (1) the Bureau’s goals for timeliness of pass-
10 port issuance, the basis for such goals, and its per-
11 formance compared to those goals;

12 (2) key factors affecting timeliness of passport
13 issuance and the extent to which the Bureau has ad-
14 dressed those factors;

15 (3) key factors affecting the implementation of
16 technological solutions by the Bureau;

17 (4) the Bureau’s efforts to implement the Trav-
18 el Document Issuance System (TDIS) and other re-
19 lated information technology systems that support
20 the passport issuance process with a focus on—

21 (A) whether the Bureau is following lead-
22 ing practices for developing, acquiring, and
23 overseeing related system and infrastructure in-
24 vestments and leveraging existing technologies
25 where appropriate;

1 (B) whether the program has the work-
2 force to resolve technical issues within the sys-
3 tems; and

4 (C) identifying any vulnerabilities and limi-
5 tations of the system that may impact perform-
6 ance, including single points of failure;

7 (5) opportunities to streamline, expedite, and
8 otherwise enhance the Bureau's passport issuance
9 processes, including opportunities to reduce costs in
10 the passport issuance process;

11 (6) opportunities to partner with other Federal
12 and State agencies and leverage existing United
13 States Government information sources, such as bio-
14 metric databases, in support of the application and
15 identity verification and resolution components of
16 the passport issuance process; and

17 (7) other matters as the Comptroller General
18 may deem appropriate.

19 (b) SUBMISSION.—Not later than 180 days after the
20 date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General
21 shall—

22 (1) brief the appropriate congressional commit-
23 tees on the review required by subsection (a); and

24 (2) submit a final report upon completion of
25 such review.

1 (c) RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION RE-
2 PORT.—Not later than one year after the date on which
3 the report required by subsection (b)(2) is submitted, the
4 Assistant Secretary and the Chief Information Officer
5 shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees
6 a report on progress toward resolution of each rec-
7 ommendation made in the report required by such sub-
8 section and planned steps that will be taken to resolve
9 each recommendation.

10 **SEC. 8. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**

11 Nothing in this Act may be construed as an offer to
12 procure a service or services or as a guarantee of a con-
13 tract for such services.

14 **SEC. 9. DEFINITIONS.**

15 In this Act—

16 (1) the term “appropriate congressional com-
17 mittees” means—

18 (A) the Committee on Foreign Affairs and
19 the Committee on Appropriations of the House
20 of Representatives; and

21 (B) the Committee on Foreign Relations
22 and the Committee on Appropriations of the
23 Senate;

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

1 (3) except as otherwise provided, the term “Bu-
2 reau” means the Bureau of Consular Affairs of the
3 Department;

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

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

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

9 (A) means all steps of passport issuance
10 for a new passport or renewal of a passport, as
11 appropriate, from the applicant’s submission of
12 documents through document processing and
13 application adjudication to mailing of printed
14 passports; and

15 (B) includes—

16 (i) the passport application submis-
17 sion, which includes—

18 (I) the portion of the passport
19 issuance process from and including
20 passport acceptance by a passport ac-
21 ceptance agent until documents are
22 received by the Department; and

23 (II) payment processing and mail
24 shipping times; and

Passed the House of Representatives March 19, 2024.

Attest: KEVIN F. MCCUMBER,
Clerk.