

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Lowey, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Granger:

We write with urgency and concern over the Department of State's decision to cut hundreds of Passport Services contract employees nationwide. A majority of these cuts will take place at the largest of these facilities, the National Passport Center in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, but the effects will be felt throughout the country. As you work to find an agreement on appropriations for a COVID relief package, we urge the approval of sufficient funding that would prevent these job cuts and mitigate the effects on employees and their families.

The lack of planning and order around staffing decisions at the Passport Service facilities continues to be of great concern, and the haphazard nature of the dismissals – some involving employees who have worked at these facilities for decades – appears set to damage the ability of these facilities to return to normal operations once demand for passports goes back to pre-pandemic levels. While there is a decreased demand for travel due to the COVID-19 crisis, maintaining a workforce of experienced and appropriately cleared personnel will be integral to ensuring the processing capacity expected by the public, particularly if there is a surge in passport demand following the pandemic. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to provide sufficient funding in any COVID relief legislation for passport operations, so that personnel employed by this agency can continue to facilitate international travel and provide critical services to American citizens and residents.

Our nation faces unprecedented challenges as a result of this pandemic. We ought not make the situation worse by failing to fund the Passport Services contract appropriately. Should your staff have any questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to contact Naz Durakoglu (Naz_Durakoglu@shaheen.senate.gov) in Senator Shaheen's office. I appreciate the opportunity to work with you to help mitigate some hardship during this difficult time. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



Rep. Chris Pappas
Member of Congress

CC: Chairman, U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Chairwoman and Ranking Member, U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs