

Suspend the Rules and Pass the Bill, H.R. 6610, With an Amendment

(The amendment strikes all after the enacting clause and inserts a new text)

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. 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.

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 and passport processing wait times
6 of up to 13 weeks, exclusive of shipping times.

7 (2) Over the past several years, the Department
8 has experienced repeated delays in its attempts to
9 modernize the passport issuance process.

10 (3) The adoption of additional commercially
11 available information technology solutions at several
12 stages of the passport issuance process could greatly
13 enhance and accelerate such process.

14 (4) The United States passport is a widely rec-
15 ognized and trusted identity and travel document
16 that is of tremendous importance to its bearer
17 around the globe.

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

19 It is the sense of Congress that—

20 (1) as a routine matter, an adult who has sub-
21 mitted a routine new or renewal passport application

1 should be reliably able to expect that such applica-
2 tion will be adjudicated by the Department, at a rea-
3 sonable cost, in a time frame which is conducive to
4 international travel;

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

12 (3) the Department should take all reasonable
13 steps, including the use of available technology and
14 best practices, to protect the integrity of the pass-
15 port issuance process, the privacy of passport hold-
16 ers, and the efficiency of processing passport
17 issuance requests.

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

19 In administering and modernizing the passport
20 issuance process, the Assistant Secretary shall evaluate
21 the performance of such process against the following cri-
22 teria:

23 (1) To maintain a service standard of proc-
24 essing a routine new or renewal adult passport appli-
25 cation from document submission until mailing of

1 final documents in an expeditious and reliable time-
2 frame.

3 (2) To maintain affordable passport fees and
4 surcharges.

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

8 (4) To minimize downtime for the Travel Docu-
9 ment Issuance System.

10 (5) To minimize the suspense rate resulting
11 from typographical, clerical, or picture-based errors,
12 including by enabling such suspensions to be re-
13 solved electronically.

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

16 (7) To provide reasonably convenient passport
17 services to United States citizens and nationals liv-
18 ing a significant distance from a passport agency,
19 particularly residents in a significant population cen-
20 ter more than a 5-hour drive from a passport agen-
21 cy.

1 **SEC. 5. ENHANCED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SOLU-**
2 **TIONS TO IMPROVE THE PASSPORT**
3 **ISSUANCE PROCESS.**

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

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

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

21 (2)(A) Not later than 2 years after the date of
22 the enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary,
23 in consultation with the Chief Information Officer,
24 shall take all reasonable steps, including if necessary
25 the awarding of a contract for the establishment and
26 ongoing maintenance of a service to provide to pass-

1 port applicants automated, voluntary proactive com-
2 munications, by email or text message, for each
3 progress point in the passport issuance process, and
4 for the notification of application errors, and deliv-
5 ery of mail tracking numbers, and reminders of re-
6 newal eligibility.

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

13 (C) The services described in subparagraph (A)
14 shall provide separate options for email and text
15 message notification, as well as separate options for
16 processing-related notifications and renewal eligi-
17 bility notifications.

18 (3)(A) Consistent with the Bureau's moderniza-
19 tion plans and timelines, and subject to the avail-
20 ability of funds, the Assistant Secretary, in consulta-
21 tion with the Chief Information Officer, shall seek to
22 enter into a contract or contracts as appropriate, for
23 the establishment and maintenance of a mobile ap-
24 plication to allow for the centralization of applicant
25 communication with the Department, including doc-

1 ument submission, application status tracking, vir-
2 tual appointments, access to the notification of ap-
3 plication errors, and allowing for passport holders to
4 receive messages from the Department and commu-
5 nicate emergencies to the Department.

6 (B) The Assistant Secretary shall provide each
7 passport applicant with the option of whether to use
8 the mobile application described in subparagraph
9 (A) or another service of the Department.

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

17 (4)(A) Consistent with existing law, the Assist-
18 ant Secretary, in consultation with the Chief Infor-
19 mation Officer, shall expand the online passport re-
20 newal system, including to accommodate electronic
21 acceptance of routine first-time adult applications as
22 applicable, in addition to adult renewal applications
23 in sufficient volume to be able to accommodate most
24 applications by the date that is four years from the
25 date of enactment of this Act.

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

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

16 (D) In expanding the online passport renewal
17 system pursuant to subparagraph (C), the following
18 services should be included or otherwise accounted
19 for:

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

23 (ii) To the extent possible, remote docu-
24 ment verification tools and infrastructure, to

1 allow for a passport transaction to be completed
2 entirely remotely.

3 (iii) To the extent possible, information
4 technology infrastructure not already main-
5 tained by the Department.

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

17 (B) The tools described in subparagraph (A)
18 shall be fully operational within 4 years of the date
19 of the enactment of this Act.

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

23 (D) The Assistant Secretary, in consultation
24 with the Chief Information Officer, shall ensure that
25 the tools described in subparagraph (A) are imple-

1 mented consistent with the maintenance of stand-
2 ards appropriate to ensuring the integrity of the
3 United States passport.

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

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

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

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

24 (3) the Bureau cannot procure such services for
25 significantly reduced cost externally.

1 (d) PREFERENCE.—In procuring and implementing
2 the information technology solutions described in sub-
3 section (b), preference should be given to entities with the
4 technical expertise necessary for the project and capacity
5 to deliver timely solutions.

6 (e) ROLE OF CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Chief Information Offi-
8 cer's concurrence shall be required before the Assist-
9 ant Secretary awards a contract pursuant to this
10 section.

11 (2) RELATING TO SYSTEMS.—With respect to
12 the contracting and implementation of the systems
13 described in subsection (b), the Chief Information
14 Officer shall have—

15 (A) final decision making authority on the
16 technical feasibility and specifications, cyberse-
17 curity requirements, compatibility with existing
18 Department information technology infrastruc-
19 ture, and the feasibility of timelines from a
20 technical standpoint; and

21 (B) final approval of all technical matters
22 before full implementation.

23 (3) EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS.—In selecting
24 the services described in subsection (b), the Assist-

1 ant Secretary and the Chief Information Officer
2 shall include in the criteria for selection—

3 (A) the ability of the proposal to maintain
4 security, including the cybersecurity, standards
5 appropriate to the United States passport and
6 to protect personally identifiable information;

7 (B) scalability to accommodate current and
8 future passport demand; and

9 (C) long-term viability and upgradability.

10 (f) INTERIM ACTION PLAN.—

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

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

22 (A) Progress made on implementing the
23 information technology solutions described in
24 subsection (b) within specific timelines, and ad-
25 ditional steps planned.

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

4 (C) 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 (D) Efforts to ensure world-class cyberse-
11 curity standards for protection of passport ap-
12 plicant data and the passport issuance process
13 infrastructure, particularly such infrastructure
14 involved in adjudication of passport applica-
15 tions.

16 (E) Other specific planned steps that the
17 Bureau will take to achieve the criteria de-
18 scribed in section 4.

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

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

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

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

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

8 **SEC. 6. RESEARCH ON COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE INFOR-**
9 **MATION TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS.**

10 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 60 days after the
11 enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary, in coordi-
12 nation with the Chief Information Officer, shall establish
13 a working group of appropriate Department employees,
14 and contractors as appropriate, to liaise with the private
15 sector for the purposes of identifying commercially avail-
16 able technologies that may be adopted by the Bureau to
17 advance the criteria described in section 4, evaluating pro-
18 posed technological solutions, and augmenting the Bu-
19 reau’s ongoing modernization efforts.

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

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

9 (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
10 of the enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary, in
11 coordination with the Chief Information Officer, shall sub-
12 mit to the appropriate congressional committees a re-
13 port—

14 (1) describing the usefulness of the working
15 group to the Department’s ongoing modernization
16 efforts and its reception by private sector actors;

17 (2) containing a summary of each proposal
18 made to the working group pursuant to this section
19 and whether the Secretary intends to adopt each
20 proposal;

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

1 **SEC. 7. GAO REPORT.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of the
3 United States shall conduct a comprehensive review of the
4 passport issuance process, including—

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

8 (2) key factors affecting timeliness of passport
9 issuance and the extent to which the Bureau has ad-
10 dressed those factors;

11 (3) key factors affecting the implementation of
12 technological solutions by the Bureau;

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

17 (A) whether the Bureau is following lead-
18 ing practices for developing, acquiring, and
19 overseeing related system and infrastructure in-
20 vestments and leveraging existing technologies
21 where appropriate;

22 (B) whether the program has the work-
23 force to resolve technical issues within the sys-
24 tems; and

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

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

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

14 (7) other matters as the Comptroller General
15 may deem appropriate.

16 (b) SUBMISSION.—Not later than 180 days after the
17 date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General
18 shall—

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

21 (2) submit a final report upon completion of
22 such review.

23 (c) RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION RE-
24 PORT.—Not later than one year after the date on which
25 the report required by subsection (b)(2) is submitted, the

1 Assistant Secretary and the Chief Information Officer
2 shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees
3 a report on progress toward resolution of each rec-
4 ommendation made in the report required by such sub-
5 section and planned steps that will be taken to resolve
6 each recommendation.

7 **SEC. 8. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**

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

11 **SEC. 9. DEFINITIONS.**

12 In this Act—

13 (1) the term “appropriate congressional com-
14 mittees” means—

15 (A) the Committee on Foreign Affairs and
16 the Committee on Appropriations of the House
17 of Representatives; and

18 (B) the Committee on Foreign Relations
19 and the Committee on Appropriations of the
20 Senate;

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

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

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

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

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

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

12 (B) includes—

13 (i) the passport application submis-
14 sion, which includes—

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

20 (II) payment processing and mail
21 shipping times; and

22 (ii) the passport application proc-
23 essing, which includes the portion of the
24 passport issuance process from the recep-
25 tion of completed applications and their

1 distribution to passport agencies for adju-
2 dication until finished passports and appli-
3 cation documents are mailed to applicants;
4 and
5 (7) the term “Secretary” means the Secretary
6 of State.