April 5, 2021

Dear President Biden and Mr. Ferriero,

We respectfully request for your administration to take immediate action to eliminate the records request backlog at The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). As of March 8, 2021, the NPRC had an approximate backlog of 480,000 record requests from veterans and their families. Without these records, veterans cannot access the essential services they have earned while defending our country. Records at the NPRC are required for veterans to receive COVID-19 vaccinations from the VA, GI Bill education benefits, VA loans, medical benefits, burial benefits, disability compensation, life insurance, and other services. We ask that your administration use every available resource to ensure our nation’s veterans retain access to these vital services while waiting for their records.

Hospitals around the country have continuously operated throughout the pandemic because they provide essential services. The NPRC is equally important. Without the records it provides, veterans are deprived of Veterans Health Administration services, from routine preventative care to cancer treatment or mental health services. The administration must confront the reality that the NPRC’s operation is essential and must ensure that it reopens immediately and operates at its maximum capacity—just as hospitals, drug manufacturers, and grocery stores have done throughout the pandemic.

COVID-19 has created unprecedented issues for our federal agencies. We understand the challenges the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has faced to ensure its employees' safety while continuing the operation of its services. In Mr. Ferriero’s December 10, 2020 letter to Congress, he outlined the NPRC’s COVID-19 response measures:

“We have expanded the work week at the NPRC to include Saturdays and, beginning November 30, we implemented a second shift on weekdays, allowing us to double the on-site workforce without exceeding maximum safe occupancy limits. We have partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which has detailed VA employees to the NPRC, to expedite the processing of VA requests for records.”

Despite these measures, the NPRC backlog has only continued to grow. Overall, NARA’s response has been insufficient to solve the problem.

On December 27, 2020, President Trump signed H.R.133, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, which included $50 million in emergency appropriations for the NARA Revolving Fund. The NPRC received $15 million from this funding source to reduce the records request backlog, deploy resources for staff to work remotely, and hire temporary employees. These funds prevented NARA from furloughing employees at record centers, including the NPRC, yet the backlog has only grown. Additionally, the NPRC is not operating its call center. Attempts to call the emergency contact number have resulted in a busy signal, and the NPRC’s customer service line is simply unstaffed.

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While we are pleased that NARA has announced an expansion of on-site workers at NPRC by March 18, we would still like to see a full commitment to reopening at 100% capacity and a plan to reduce the records backlog. The backlog at the NPRC and its response to COVID-19 are an unacceptable disservice to those who bravely served our country. To ensure that we are fulfilling our obligations to our nation’s veterans, we ask the following:

1. We ask that the Biden Administration take every available action to reopen the NPRC, including:
   a. Coordinate with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and NARA to prioritize employees at the NPRC for vaccinations and to report to Congress on NPRC’s plans to reopen based on staff vaccinations.
   b. Evaluate the feasibility of the NPRC’s staff working overtime and in continuous shifts until the backlog is eliminated. We ask that the shifts consist of the maximum number of employees as is consistent with the appropriate safety guidelines.
   c. We ask that the NPRC implement this work schedule or send a report to Congress outlining the resources it will need to implement such a schedule by April 30, 2021.
   d. We ask that the NPRC work with the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense, and other agencies to increase the number of workers at the NPRC.
   e. We ask that NARA explore the option to work with government contractors to increase the number of workers at the NPRC.

2. The Department of Homeland Security’s “Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce” identifies workers required for administrative operations for direct patient care as essential healthcare workers.\(^3\) We ask that NARA similarly treat the NPRC employees as essential healthcare workers for the purposes of COVID-19 vaccinations, testing, and access to personal protective equipment.

3. We ask that the administration reevaluate or establish safety guidelines specific to the NPRC’s circumstances and provide Congress with the exact reopening guidelines.

4. We ask that the NPRC staff its call center or provide Congress with a report outlining the resources it will need to staff its call center.

5. For the purposes of granting VA burial services, we ask that the VA accept materials that can reasonably be used to verify a veteran’s service record including service awards, VHA service cards, or a signed affidavit from fellow soldiers or the veteran’s family to verify their service.

We cannot allow our nation’s veterans to die while waiting for a piece of paper to prove they are entitled to medical services. We cannot continue to abandon military families arranging burial services for their family members. The United States government must correct this injustice.

We look forward to seeing a swift, effective, and permanent solution to this problem.

Sincerely,

Warren Davidson  
Member of Congress

Deborah K. Ross  
Member of Congress

Mike Bost  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs

\(^3\)https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ECIW_4.0_Guidance_on_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workers_Final3_508_0.pdf
Maria Elvira Salazar  
Member of Congress

Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress

Randy Feenstra  
Member of Congress

Scott Fitzgerald  
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress

Lizzie Fletcher  
Member of Congress

Bill Foster  
Member of Congress

Virginia Foxx  
Member of Congress

Scott Franklin  
Member of Congress

Russ Fulcher  
Member of Congress

Matt Gaetz  
Member of Congress

Mike Gallagher  
Member of Congress

Andrew Garbarino  
Member of Congress

Mike Garcia  
Member of Congress

Bob Gibbs  
Member of Congress

Carlos Gimenez  
Member of Congress

Louie Gohmert  
Member of Congress

Jared Golden  
Member of Congress

Anthony Gonzalez  
Member of Congress

Paul Gosar  
Member of Congress

Sam Graves  
Member of Congress

Marjorie Greene  
Member of Congress

Jim Hagedorn  
Member of Congress
Adam Kinzinger  
Member of Congress

Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress

David Kustoff  
Member of Congress

Darin LaHood  
Member of Congress

Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress

Robert E. Latta  
Member of Congress

Brenda L. Lawerence  
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee  
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Susie Lee  
Member of Congress

Billy Long  
Member of Congress

Barry Loudermilk  
Member of Congress

Frank Lucas  
Member of Congress

Elaine Luria  
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress

Nicole Malliotakis  
Member of Congress

Kathy Manning  
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Thomas Massie  
Member of Congress

Brian Mast  
Member of Congress

Lucy McBeth  
Member of Congress

Michael McCaul  
Member of Congress

Tom McClintock  
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

Patrick McHenry  
Member of Congress
David McKinley
Member of Congress

Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
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Peter Meijer
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Dan Meuser
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Mary E. Miller
Member of Congress

Alex Mooney
Member of Congress

Barry Moore
Member of Congress

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress

Gregory F. Murphy, M.D.
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

Ralph Norman
Member of Congress

Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress

Greg Pence
Member of Congress

Dean Phillips
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
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Bill Posey
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David Price
Member of Congress

Guy Reschenthaler
Member of Congress

John Rose
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Matt Rosendale  
Member of Congress

Chip Roy  
Member of Congress

John H. Rutherford  
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Kurt Schrader  
Member of Congress

Kim Schrier, M.D.  
Member of Congress

Chris Smith  
Member of Congress

Jason Smith  
Member of Congress

Adrian Smith  
Member of Congress

Lloyd Smucker  
Member of Congress

Darren Soto  
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Greg Stanton  
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Pete Stauber  
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Bryan Steil  
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W. Gregory Steube  
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Chris Stewart  
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Steve Stivers  
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Thomas R. Suozzi  
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Van Taylor  
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Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson  
Member of Congress

Tom Tiffany  
Member of Congress

William Timmons  
Member of Congress

Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress

Michael R. Turner  
Member of Congress