

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 5, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable David S. Ferriero
Archivist of the United States
The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road College Park, MD 20740-6001

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.¹ 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.”²

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.

¹<https://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2021/nr21-30>

²Ferriero, David S. Archivist of the United States. Letter to Congress. 10 December 2020.

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

³https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ECIW_4.0_Guidance_on_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workers_Final3_508_0.pdf



Rick Allen
Member of Congress



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress



Troy Balderson
Member of Congress



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



Dan Bishop
Member of Congress

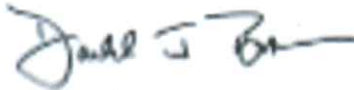
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Member of Congress



Kelly Armstrong
Member of Congress



Don Bacon
Member of Congress



Andy Barr
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



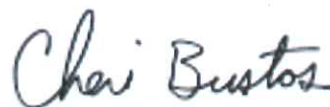
Gus Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress



Ted Budd
Member of Congress



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress



Jodey Arrington
Member of Congress



James R. Baird
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress



Stephanie Bice
Member of Congress



Sanford Bishop
Member of Congress



Mo Brooks
Member of Congress



Tim Burchett
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Ken Calvert
Member of Congress



Kat Cammack
Member of Congress

André Carsen
Member of Congress



Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress



Ed Case
Member of Congress



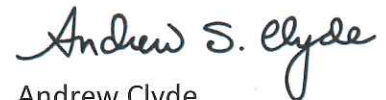
Madison Cawthorn
Member of Congress



Steve Chabot
Member of Congress



Ben Cline
Member of Congress



Andrew Clyde
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Tom Cole
Member of Congress



James Comer
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



Rick Crawford
Member of Congress



Charlie Crist
Member of Congress



Jason Crow
Member of Congress



Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress

Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress



Rodney Davis
Member of Congress



Scott DesJarlais
Member of Congress



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress



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



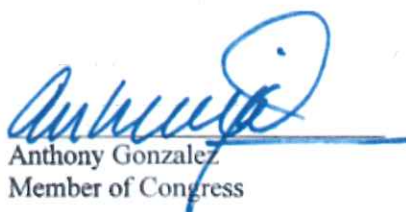
Carlos Gimenez



Louie Gohmert



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



Andy Harris
Member of Congress



Disana Harshbarger
Member of Congress



Kevin Hern
Member of Congress



Jody Hice
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress



Clay Higgins
Member of Congress



French Hill
Member of Congress



Ashley Hinson
Member of Congress



Trey Hollingsworth
Member of Congress



Richard Hudson
Member of Congress



Darrell Issa
Member of Congress



Ronny L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



Bill Johnson
Member of Congress




Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Jim Jordan
Member of Congress



David P. Joyce
Member of Congress



John Joyce
Member of Congress



Kai Kahele
Member of Congress



John Katko
Member of Congress



Fred Keller
Member of Congress



Andy Kim
Member of Congress



Young Kim
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. Lawrence
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



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
Member of Congress



Thomas Massie
Member of Congress



Brian Mast
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



Michael McCaul
Member of Congress



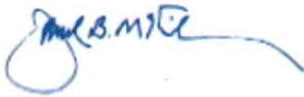
Tom McClintock
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



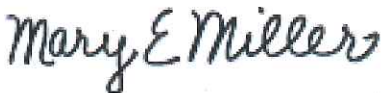
Patrick McHenry
Member of Congress



David McKinley
Member of Congress



Peter Meijer
Member of Congress



Mary Miller
Member of Congress



Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



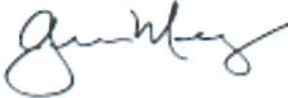
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



David Price
Member of Congress



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Alex Mooney
Member of Congress



Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Greg Pence
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Guy Reschenthaler
Member of Congress



Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress



Dan Meuser
Member of Congress



Barry Moore
Member of Congress



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



Ralph Norman
Member of Congress



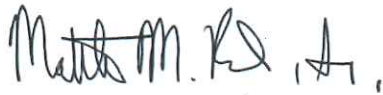
Dean Phillips
Member of Congress



Bill Posey
Member of Congress



John Rose
Member of Congress



Matt Rosendale
Member of Congress



Chip Roy
Member of Congress



John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress



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
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



Bryan Steil
Member of Congress



W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress



Chris Stewart
Member of Congress



Steve Stivers
Member of Congress



Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



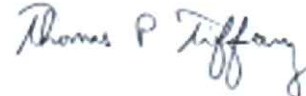
Van Taylor
Member of Congress



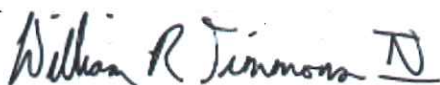
Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Tom Tiffany
Member of Congress



William Timmons
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



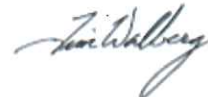
Michael R. Turner
Member of Congress



David G. Valadao
Member of Congress



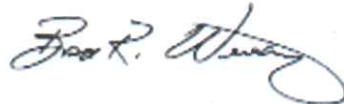
Ann Wagner
Member of Congress



Tim Walberg
Member of Congress



Mike Waltz
Member of Congress



Brad R. Wenstrup, D.P.M.
Member of Congress



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress



Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress



Roger Williams
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



Lee Zeldin
Member of Congress

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

Vicente González
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress