MARK R. WARNER
VIRGINIA

COMMITTEES:

FINANCE

BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS

BUDGET

INTELLIGENCE

RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–4606

March 30, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I write today to express my concern and frustration with the State Department's Online Passport Renewal (OPR) system.

The OPR system opened to the public in a pilot status in August 2022, and the agency reports it received more than 500,000 applications before they system closed in February 2023. During that time, many Virginians participated in utilizing this system to submit their passport renewals. Since the start of 2023, my office has received a significant increase in requests from Virginians who are experiencing considerable delays in the processing of their renewal applications filed through the OPR system prior to its closure. In many cases, my constituents filed well in advance of their travel date and paid for expedited processing. That said, the applicants still faced delays and, in some cases, ultimately needed to physically travel to a Passport Agency, often the day before their scheduled travel, in order to have their passport issued.

In an increasingly online age, I welcome the ability for my constituents to renew their passports through a secure paperless process. However, the OPR system seems to be fraught with significant errors that have caused Virginians headaches, stress, and unfortunately in some instances, delayed or missed travel. Simply put, the service my constituents have received is unacceptable. Therefore, I ask that you please address the following questions:

1. How does the agency's handling of passport applications submitted online differ from those that are filed through traditional processes, either by applying at a Passport Acceptance Facility in person or by U.S. Mail?
2. How does the agency determine the assignment of OPR applications to their Passport Agencies across the country? How does this compare to the assignment of traditional applications received?
3. What is the current average processing time of an application submitted through the OPR process compared to those submitted through the traditional process? Please indicate the processing time for applications submitted under both expedited and routine processing.
4. Does agency data reflect that some Passport Agencies are more successful in processing OPR applications timely than others? If so, what does the agency believe is the source of this imbalance, and how is the agency addressing this problem?

5. Members of my staff have been told by Passport Agency officials that "technical issues" can at times impede the processing of an OPR application and that officials must transfer the application into the traditional system for final processing. Can you further explain these technical issues and what steps the agency is taking to fix these issues?

My office has been told that the agency is experiencing "an unprecedented volume of early demand for passports this year." I commend officials at Passport Agencies across the country for their tireless work in adjudicating millions of passport applications each year. However, it appears that the OPR system's flaws are directly inhibiting this effort, and I look forward to understanding how the agency will address existing challenges and improve the system for future use.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

MARK R. WARNER
United States Senator