

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 8, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
The United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

I 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. While I am aware of the decreased demand for travel due to the COVID-19 crisis and the effect this has had on passport processing, I urge the Department to reassess these job cuts and mitigate the effects on employees and their families.

I understand that the number of contractors employed by Passport Services depends on passport demand. The unprecedented decline in passport operations due to the pandemic does not, however, prevent the Department from adequately informing their staff or Congress of upcoming changes. Employees affected by the most recent cuts should have been provided with more notice and a better explanation of severance opportunities. Unfortunately, only an initial group of Passport Services employees was provided with limited notice. A second round of employees lost their jobs suddenly and without appropriate warning. Furthermore, despite the unprecedented cuts, Congress was not informed in advance.

I appreciate the Department's recent decision to ask a number of these employees to return to work following a meeting with my office on September 21. The lack of planning and order around staffing decisions at these facilities continues to be of great concern, however, and has nothing to do with the drop-off in passport demand. Mr. Secretary, the professional handling of these employees, some of whom have worked at these facilities for decades, is not only paramount to workplace morale, but it is a necessity to ensure the return of these experienced employees once demand for passports goes back to pre-pandemic levels.

Going forward, I am encouraged by the Department's commitment to rehiring these employees. The return of experienced and appropriately cleared personnel will be integral to ensuring processing capacity, particularly if there is a surge in passport demand following the pandemic. As such, I request a detailed description of the Department's rehiring and recruitment plans. In addition, I would like to know of any improvements that the Department is considering to its IT modernization strategy to better accommodate unforeseen circumstances and future emergencies impacting employees' ability to perform their important duties at passport processing facilities.

I understand the great challenge facing American families and businesses nationwide as a result of the pandemic. I appreciate the opportunity to work with you to help mitigate some hardship during this difficult time. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

CC: Carl Risch, Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, Department of State