

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
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July 12, 2021

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

The Committee on Oversight and Reform must hold a hearing to address the records request backlog at the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). Because of reductions in on-site personnel during the pandemic, a massive backlog of nearly 500,000 requests for records has been created to the detriment of veterans who desperately need access to these records to obtain the benefits to which they and their family members are entitled. As the Committee with legislative jurisdiction over NARA, we must not only conduct rigorous oversight to determine how the backlog arose but also consider legislative solutions to ensure that NARA maintains an adequate in-person workforce so veterans are never again unable to obtain timely benefits.

The NPRC is a "repository of millions of military personnel, health, and medical records of discharged and deceased veterans of all services."¹ Veterans and their family members need access to these records to provide evidence to substantiate a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claim for benefits or overturn a prior decision on VA benefits and services. Unfortunately, some veterans are waiting a year to receive a response from the NPRC. This is unacceptable.

On June 9, 2021, NARA provided the Committee with a bipartisan briefing. While helpful and appreciated, NARA informed us that the current backlog stands at nearly 500,000 requests for records. About half are related to requests for DD-214 separation forms, which veterans need to obtain benefits. The NPRC sent most of its employees home in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet veterans records are not accessible remotely.² Unfortunately, at the time of the briefing on June 9, there was no timeline for getting the workforce back in-person to pre-pandemic levels.

¹ The Nat'l Archives, Nat'l Personnel Records Center, *Military Personnel Records*, available at <https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center/military-personnel>.

² Noah Pransky, *Veterans Across U.S. Can't Access Benefits Because Key Agency Hasn't Returned to Work*, NBCLX, Mar. 16, 2021, available at https://www.lx.com/politics/veterans-across-u-s-cant-access-benefits-becausekey-agency-hasnt-returned-to-work/32884/?_osource=sm_npd_nbc_lx_eml_gen.

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While it appears that NARA will increase the number of employees onsite by July 19, 2021, it is troubling that the workforce is still not back to work at full capacity even though the backlog stands at nearly 500,000. As such, we urge you to hold a hearing to conduct oversight on why there was not a plan to address records request effectively during the pandemic, how the agency plans to resolve the backlog, and why the workforce has taken so long to return to pre-pandemic levels. The Committee should also examine legislative solutions to ensure that there is a sufficient number of employees working in-person to process records requests, including Committee Member Keller's H.R. 3710, the RECORDS Act of 2021, a bill which would require a comprehensive plan to address adequate in-person staffing levels at the NPRC. We must ensure that veterans are never again unable to receive the records they need for benefits earned while serving the country. Veterans fought for our nation and it is times like these that we must fight for them.

Thank you for your attention to this important request.

Sincerely,



Fred Keller
Member of Congress



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Jody Hice
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government
Operations



Glenn Grothman
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Subcommittee on National Security



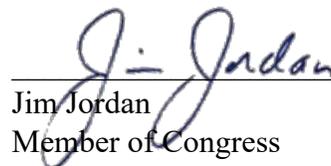
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Consumer Policy



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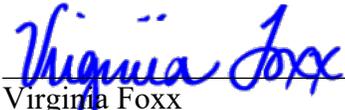
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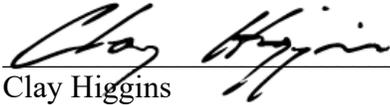
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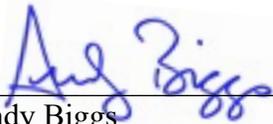
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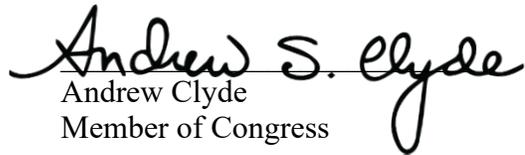
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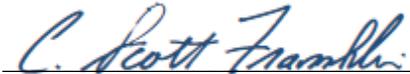
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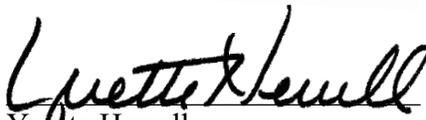
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cc: The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly, Chairman
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The Honorable Stephen F. Lynch, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security

The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi, Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy

The Honorable Ro Khanna
Subcommittee on Environment

The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Chairman
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties