

The Honorable Carolyn Maloney  
Chairwoman, House Committee  
on Oversight and Reform  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Quigley  
Chairman, House Committee on  
Appropriations, Subcommittee  
on Financial Services and  
General Government  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Takano  
Chairman, House Committee  
on Veterans Affairs  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gary Peters  
Chairman, Senate Committee on  
Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris VanHollen  
Chairman, Senate Committee on  
Appropriations, Subcommittee  
on Financial Services and  
General Government  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester  
Chairman, Senate Committee  
on Veterans Affairs  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Comer  
Ranking Member, House Committee on  
Oversight and Reform  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Womack Ranking  
Member, House Committee on  
Appropriations, Subcommittee on  
Financial Services and General  
Government  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Bost  
Ranking Member, House Committee on  
Veterans Affairs  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rob Portman  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on  
Homeland Security and Governmental  
Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on  
Appropriations, Subcommittee on  
Financial Services and General  
Government  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on  
Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510



Archivist of the  
United States

4 October 2021

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

I am writing to provide you with another of my regular updates on the backlog of requests for veterans' records at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). Since my last letter to you on July 19, 2021, we have taken additional steps to mitigate the impact of the late summer surge in COVID cases caused by the Delta Variant, and initiated actions to safely return more staff to onsite work.

As I wrote to you in my last letter, the Delta variant surge caused me to pause a plan to recall most NPRC staff for onsite work in July. When local public health conditions in the St. Louis area rapidly worsened over July and August, I made the decision to once again reduce the numbers of onsite staff. This interrupted the progress that was being made to reduce the backlog as the number of onsite staff was limited to dealing primarily with urgent requests such as those involving funerals, medical emergencies, and homeless veterans seeking shelter. The backlog of public requests stands at over 550,000. At the same time, however, the NPRC continues to meet the service demands of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) by ensuring that the majority of requests needed to assist with benefit claims are completed in three days or less.

With local health conditions now slowly improving, and with the Administration's new vaccine and testing requirements for federal employees and contractors, and NARA's recent consultations with the Centers for Disease Control to validate mitigation strategies to safely increase NPRC's on-site occupancy, I approved a plan for more NPRC staff to resume onsite work, which began with 25% occupancy on September 27. As we continue to assess the effectiveness of our COVID mitigation efforts, our goal over the next month is to reach approximately 75% of our pre pandemic total for onsite personnel while continuing to maximize the amount of work being done by those working remotely. We will do this by continuing to operate with multiple shifts, including a recently enacted third shift. We have also partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish an alternate facility to deploy additional staff for the servicing of requests involving paper records, and our partnership with them to digitize

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NPRC holdings and make them available to NPRC and VA staff for more efficient servicing is also underway and will continue to scale up over the coming weeks.

NPRC staff, many of whom are veterans themselves, are eager to restore service to pre-pandemic levels. Our plan to do this is underway and, with support from Congress, we have already taken the following steps to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and address the backlog:

- Built and deployed secure digital delivery functionality to enable staff to respond to public requests electronically in instances where digital records are available and requesters have submitted an email address with their request.
- Upgraded eVetRecs, an online portal for the submission of requests, to allow for digital signatures by requesters, electronic status checks, and the submission of emergency reference requests.
- Restored NPRC Call Center services to pre-pandemic levels by standing up a remote call center using softphone technology.
- Purchased and deployed laptop computers and peripheral equipment to enable staff to service requests electronically in instances where digital records are available.
- Issued letters designating NPRC staff as critical infrastructure employees to provide priority access to vaccines as they became available. Also partnered with the Veterans Health Administration to make vaccines available to the NPRC workforce.
- Partnered with the VA to digitize NPRC's backlog of raw mail. The entire backlog of raw mail has now been digitized and entered into NPRC's production system.
- Partnering with the VA to digitize the service records of all living veterans, starting with those that have claims pending with the VA or requests pending with NPRC. This project began in September and will scale up in October.
- Issued a Task Order to develop functionality to ingest digitized records from the VA into NPRC's Production System and integrate them into the NPRC workflow.

- Reconfigured space to support the on-site digitization of records and return to the workplace safety measures.
- Initiated the recruitment of over 150 new staff members and more than doubled the number of contract employees. The increase in capacity will support the elimination of the backlog as onsite occupancy limitations are increased and greater volumes of electronic records become available.
- Throughout most of the pandemic, NPRC has operated a daily second shift and has operated shifts on most Saturdays and Sundays and some holidays, and beginning on September 20, 2021 it stood up a third daily shift.
- To increase the capacity to service requests involving paper records, an alternate NPRC location has been established. Records are shipped to the alternate site for servicing by NPRC staff who can spread out at a safe social distance while servicing these requests.
- Service delivery to the Veterans Benefits Administration has been restored and is often exceeding pre-pandemic levels. NPRC leadership meets daily with their counterparts at the VBA to ensure the VA has prompt access to records needed to adjudicate claims for veterans benefits.

I want to assure you that I am committed to eliminating the backlog and restoring response times at the NPRC to where they were before the pandemic and better. With the actions noted above underway, I expect the NPRC to eliminate the backlog of public requests by the end of FY 2022.

Thank you for your continued support of our nation's veterans and the NPRC's mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David S. Ferriero". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

DAVID S. FERRIERO  
Archivist of the United States

cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives  
Members of the U.S. Senate