

Welch's office remains available to assist Vermonters experiencing delays

Washington, DC - The House unanimously passed legislation Monday afternoon supported by Rep. Peter Welch seeking to alleviate passport request delays.

The legislation, H.R. 2845, enables the Department of State to respond to increased demand caused by new passport rules, which have resulted in major backlogs felt by many Vermonters.

"The Administration was woefully ill-prepared to adequately respond to new passport rules. This legislation takes immediate steps to address the current backlog and should reduce passport wait times for Vermonters," said Welch.

"My office remains available to continue helping Vermonters facing delays in getting their passport," added Welch. Welch's office has helped dozens of Vermonters receive their passports in advance of their planned departure dates by speeding up responses to their passport requests.

The Department of State Crisis Response Act of 2007 gives the Department of State flexibility to rehire retired Foreign Service employees to staff overwhelmed passport processing centers experiencing backlogs in issuing new passports. The legislation gives the Department access to experienced workers who can be called up to help process passport applications safely and efficiently.

The State Department has said it underestimated the demand caused by the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which resulted in more than 1 million passport applications a month. This surge in requests has overwhelmed passport centers and their staff, causing delays of sometimes more than six weeks over normal processing times.

New passport adjudicators must receive three months to a year in training and security clearance, leaving the Department with minimal flexibility to respond to increases in demand.

House passes reform to alleviate passport backlogs

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This legislation would allow the Department to staff-up while training new long-term workers.

The same bill passed the Senate, S.966, in late June and will now go directly to the President.