

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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October 20, 2021

Dr. Brett M. Baker
Inspector General
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road, Room 1300
College Park, MD 20740

Dear Inspector General Baker:

The Committee requests that the Office of Inspector General evaluate the backlog of records requests at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) within the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and make recommendations for how NARA can more effectively and efficiently reduce the backlog of NPRC records requests to restore service to veterans and their families.

NPRC maintains and services military personnel and medical records on behalf of the Department of Defense.¹ Veterans require access to records serviced by NPRC to receive certain service-related benefits, including medical treatment, unemployment assistance, and emergency housing services.² NPRC has been unable to process thousands of nonemergency requests for records since implementing workplace restrictions in response to the coronavirus pandemic, leading to a backlog of thousands of unfulfilled requests.³

In recent months, NPRC has taken steps in an effort to begin to address the backlog and restore service to pre-pandemic levels. NPRC has partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs to digitize hard-copy records requests and make digital copies of service records for all living veterans, prioritizing those with pending claims. More recently, NPRC has acquired more

¹ Letter from Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero, National Archives and Records Administration, to Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, et al. (Dec. 9, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/NARA.201209.Letter%20re%20NPRC.pdf>).

² National Archives and Records Administration, *Press Release: National Personnel Records Center Prepares for Expansion of Onsite Workforce* (Mar. 8, 2021) (online at www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2021/mr21-30).

³ Letter from Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero, National Archives and Records Administration, to Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, et al. (July 19, 2021) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/NARA.210719.Update%20re%20NPRC.pdf>).

The Honorable Dr. Brett M. Baker

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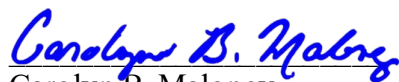
space and hired additional workers to safely run multiple in-person shifts per day, while also enhancing its capacity to fulfill records requests remotely.⁴

Although NARA initially projected that it would clear the backlog by the end of calendar year 2022, recent updates suggest that the backlog could be resolved as soon as October 1, 2022.⁵ Unfortunately, NARA's most recent update to Congress on October 4, 2021, indicated that more than 550,000 requests are currently in the backlog and that progress to reduce the backlog was interrupted by the spread of the more contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus.⁶ NARA must keep its workforce safe, but the agency also needs to take action to ensure our veterans do not wait years for records they require to access critical services.

The Committee requests that your office conduct a review of the factors that contributed to the backlog, as well as NARA's efforts to resolve it. We also ask that you make any recommendations you find are warranted related to: how the backlog can be reduced more efficiently; how communications with veterans and their families about the backlog can be improved; how NARA can upgrade its IT infrastructure and further digitize necessary records to enable remote processing; how NARA can enhance its ability to acquire and award contracts to process the backlog; and what, if any, additional resources would be required to process outstanding records requests in a timely manner.

Thank you for your attention to this serious issue. If you have questions about this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform

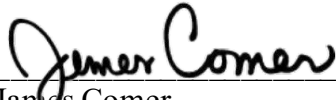


Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security

⁴ Letter from Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero, National Archives and Records Administration, to Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, et al. (Oct. 4, 2021) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/NARA.211004.Update%20re%20NPRC.pdf>)

⁵ *Id.*; Letter from Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero, National Archives and Records Administration, to Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, et al. (July 19, 2021) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/NARA.210719.Update%20re%20NPRC.pdf>).

⁶ Letter from Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero, National Archives and Records Administration, to Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, et al. (July 19, 2021) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/NARA.210719.Update%20re%20NPRC.pdf>).



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Glenn Grothman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security