

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

19 July 2021

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

I am writing to provide you with another update 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 March 31, progress has been made on several fronts:

- All NPRC staff at St. Louis, MO, and Valmeyer, IL, and the Research Services, Personnel Records Division (RRP) at St. Louis, MO, who are not on a COVID-19 reasonable accommodation, have been recalled for duty on site. As soon as the public health data for the area where the Archives Drive is located falls within the CDC definition of moderate transmission, we will increase our occupancy limits so that most staff are working on site. We were scheduled to do this effective today, but last week St. Louis County moved from moderate to substantial transmission and is close to the threshold for high transmission.
- We have started to onboard more than 100 new staff that will bring our staffing to greater than pre-pandemic levels, and we have more than doubled the number of supporting contractors on site, as compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- Service to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the temporary loan of original records needed to adjudicate disability claims has been fully restored to adjudicate disability claims has been fully restored to pre-pandemic levels or

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better, and most requests are being fulfilled in less than three days. We are servicing up to 10,000 such requests every week. Veterans who are seeking a disability benefit from the VA and do not have their military records are best served by having the VA retrieve those records from the NPRC on their behalf.

- In addition to the requests from the VA, we are presently servicing approximately 12,000 correspondence requests per week, compared to 3,000 requests per week earlier this year. With the return of on-site staff as soon as public health conditions improve, we expect to see a significant increase in production going forward. While we continue to work urgent emergency cases first, we have resumed servicing requests involving employment opportunities, home loans, and other benefits. We are also working routine requests for separation documents (DD Forms 214). We are working them first-in, first-out, with the exception that if electronic records are available and the requester has provided an email address, the request can be answered right away.
- Since the beginning of May, NPRC has responded to over 3,000 requests from Members of Congress; almost three times the volume serviced during the previous year.
- On May 10, we established a remote call center that today is responding to over 4,000 telephone inquiries per week.
- On June 19, we upgraded our online application for the submission of veterans' requests, eVetRecs, to allow for the submission of emergency requests. This improves upon recent changes made earlier during the pandemic to allow for digital signatures and status checks.
- At the time of my last letter, we had limited capacity to scan records for more efficient processing and delivery to requesters. Today, we are scanning approximately 2,000 DD Forms 214 per week, and we are working with the VA to gain access to nearly 1.5 million scanned records that exist in the Veterans Benefit Management System (VBMS). We are also partnering with the VA on plans for the mass digitization of NPRC holdings. It is our hope that this can begin as soon as this August. Mass digitization will not only transform access to NPRC holdings, it will significantly enhance the NPRC's ability to process requests remotely in the unfortunate event of a pandemic resurgence.

- We have had inquiries from the Department of Defense regarding our request for their assistance in order to further expedite the backlog elimination, but are awaiting a formal response.

With the above steps taken, the backlog growth has been curtailed, and we are now positioned to make meaningful progress towards eliminating it in the months to come. We are concentrating first on answering the requests for DD Forms 214, since those requests are most often benefit related. We plan to eliminate that portion of the backlog, which accounts for approximately 60% of the total backlog, by the end of this year. We are aiming to have the entire backlog of approximately 500,000 requests eliminated by the end of calendar year 2022.

Since the start of the pandemic, NPRC employees have responded to more than 640,000 requests from veterans, their families, and the Veterans Benefits Administration. Even through the periods of greatest community spread of the virus, NPRC staff, many of whom are veterans themselves, were on site to respond to urgent requests for funeral honors and burial services of recently deceased veterans, medical emergencies, homeless veterans seeking shelter, and other comparable emergencies, such as aid and attendance for widows of veterans. This was all done with building occupancy limitations, social distancing, and other protective measures that nonetheless resulted in 72 separate instances of on-site Covid-19 exposures, the most recent of which occurred last week.

The NPRC never shut down during the pandemic, and for the past several months it has been operating with two daily shifts, including weekends and holidays. I am extremely proud of the NPRC staff and I am grateful for the support we have received from Congress that is making it possible for them to work safely in support of our nation's veterans.

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