

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 1, 2021

The Honorable David S. Ferriero
Archivist of the United States
The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740-6001

Dear Mr. Ferriero,

I write to you today to urge you to swiftly implement a plan to address the growing backlog of veterans' records requests using the emergency funding provided by Congress in the recent appropriations and COVID-19 relief package.

As you know, veterans depend on timely access to the personnel, health, and medical records maintained by NPRC to access their Veterans Affairs benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the NPRC's operations, with the St. Louis-based facility's capacity for processing requests dramatically dropping, resulting in a growing backlog of open requests. I have heard from numerous Granite State veterans about how these operational changes have led to delays in receiving the benefits they deserve and have earned. These delays in benefits can cause potentially irreparable harm to veterans' health and financial well-being.

I appreciate your response to my previous letter regarding the continuing delays in the processing of veterans' records requests at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) that is part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Like you, I remain deeply concerned by the extensive backlog of record requests at the NPRC and the impact of this backlog on veterans. In your December 10, 2020 reply to me, you wrote that as of November 30, 2020, the backlog totaled 381,000 requests and that this backlog would likely grow to 445,000 by the end of 2020. I am encouraged by steps taken by NARA and NPRC leadership and employees to strengthen ties with the VA and to expand work shifts to expedite the processing of records requests. At the same time, more must clearly be done to reduce the significant backlog of requests while ensuring the safety of the NPRC workforce.

In response to this growing backlog and your proactive communication with members of Congress, I was pleased that we were able to include emergency funding to support the processing of military service records in the bipartisan COVID-19 relief package signed into law on December 27, 2020. The \$50 million in emergency funding for NARA's Records Center Revolving Fund is in part expected to allow the NPRC to make the critical investments needed to reduce the backlog of military service records requests during the pandemic.

I urge you to quickly use this emergency funding provided by Congress to safely resume the processing of all military personnel records requests by veterans. By February 24, 2021, please provide responses to the following questions on the plan to work through the backlog of requests:

1. What is the NPRC's current backlog of records requests and how many of these requests come from veterans? If possible, please provide my office with monthly updates of these figures through June 2021.
2. How is the emergency funding provided by Congress being used? Please include any detailed plans developed specifically to reduce the backlog of veterans' requests.
3. You indicated in your letter that the NPRC's customer service line is not currently staffed because it is located on-site at the main facility and transitioning to a remote operation would require additional resources. Will any of the emergency funding be used to transition the call center to remote operation?
4. Will either the emergency funding or regular appropriations be used to facilitate the digitization of older records? If so, what is the expected timeline for that transition? What additional resources would be required to complete that process?

Again, thank you and the dedicated public servants at the NARA and the NPRC for working to address the needs of our veterans during these difficult times. I look forward to continuing to work with you to address the backlog of veterans' record requests.

With every good wish,



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator