

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 11, 2022

The Honorable David S. Ferriero  
Archivist of the United States  
National Archives and Records Administration  
700 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20408

Dear Mr. Ferriero,

We write to express our concern over the growing backlog of Alien-file (A-file) requests pending with Federal Record Centers (FRCs) managed by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). This backlog of requests for hard-copy A-files — which contain all the immigration records relating to any non-naturalized individual— is significantly delaying the adjudication of pending naturalization cases. We urge NARA to take all necessary steps to safely speed up the processing of these A-file requests so that naturalization proceedings are not unnecessarily delayed.

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) National Records Center provides required immigration records to requesting offices. USCIS stores almost 52 million paper A-files at three FRCs in Kansas City, Missouri. USCIS needs A-files to begin the process of adjudicating applications for naturalization, known as “N-400” cases.

Prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, we understand that the Kansas City-area FRCs provided USCIS with an average of 62,000 A-files per month, resulting in a zero backlog of A-file requests. But since the beginning of the pandemic, the Kansas City-area FRCs have been only partially open at reduced capacity; at some points, they have been completely shut down. As a result, these FRCs are now processing approximately only 11,000 A-files per month. As of January 2022, there was a backlog of almost 350,000 A-file requests.

The diminished FRC operational capacity continues to slow down the processing of N-400s, with serious consequences for individuals and families nationwide. Our constituents have already been waiting many years for the opportunity to be eligible to naturalize. It is truly unfortunate — and unacceptable — that many are now forced to wait significantly longer simply based on where their A-file is located.

We appreciate the difficulties that NARA and FRC employees face given the volume of hard-copy A-files that can be accessed only by on-site staff. We also understand that the storage environment for these files is underground in excavated mines and caves that allow for humidity control, creating additional retrieval challenges. To help us further understand the scope of the

A-file storage-and-retrieval issue, we ask that you please respond in writing to the following questions by February 28, 2022:

1. What is the current A-file request backlog at the Lenexa, Kansas City, and Lee's Summit FRCs, respectively? How many A-file requests is each facility currently processing each month? What is the projected backlog growth at these facilities?
2. What communications, if any, has NARA had with any government agencies about safely increasing occupancy limits and operational capacity at the three Kansas City-area FRCs?
3. How does NARA intend to reduce and eventually eliminate the Kansas City-area A-file request backlog? What communications, if any, has NARA had with USCIS about this matter?
4. What steps, if any, has NARA taken to digitize existing A-files or require future A-files to be in electronic form? What resources would NARA need to accomplish the transition from hard-copy A-files to electronic A-files?
5. What resources can Congress provide to NARA to facilitate the timely processing of outstanding A-file requests?
6. We understand that USCIS can request the expedited processing of a particular A-file under certain humanitarian or national security-related grounds. Since March 2020, how many such requests has USCIS made to a Kansas City-area FRC? What criteria is NARA using to determine if a file-hold restriction can be lifted for a particular case? Has NARA denied any expedited A-file requests from USCIS?

We urge NARA to take whatever steps it currently can to respond to A-file requests in a timely, safe, and secure manner, and to begin to eliminate the backlog.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Veda Beltran on Senator Markey's staff at [Veda\\_Beltran@markey.senate.gov](mailto:Veda_Beltran@markey.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

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Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

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Katherine M. Clark  
Member of Congress

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Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress

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Jake Auchincloss  
Member of Congress

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Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress

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Richard Neal  
Member of Congress

/s/  

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William Keating  
Member of Congress