



August 23, 2021

UNCLASSIFIED
MEMORANDUM

TO: Rachel Arndt, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Passport Services

Through: Bradley Phillips, Division Chief, CA/PPT/PMO/PC

FROM: Lee Wentz, President NFFE 1998

SUBJECT: Appeal for restoration of COVID-19 health and safety measures

The Department of State has committed to the health and safety of its personnel as the *highest priority*. Currently, the Department's COVID-19 Coordination Team (CCT) monitors and implements safety protocols for all Passport Agencies. Passport Services has maintained an occupancy rate above the 25% called for by E.O. 13991 and OMB Guidance since being declared mission critical in June 2020. The core functions of passport issuance do not have the technological support to allow for remote or telework options. Due to this, passport employees must be physically present and engage with the public to support and achieve the Department of State's mission.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department implemented measures to promote the safety and the well-being of employees by offering Weather and Safety Leave, in addition to Department's own COVID-19 Administrative Leave. Steadily, more employees within Passport Services have returned to the office as local conditions improved and the rate of vaccinations has increased. Following this trend, the use and approval of the administrative leave benefit that many employees used was heavily curtailed.

With the increased prevalence of the COVID-19 Delta variant, there has been a corresponding increase in transmission rates among many localities surrounding passport agencies. Recently, there have been alarming outbreaks within the San Diego Passport Agency, Arkansas Printing Center, and the Miami Passport Agency. The spiking positive cases within these agencies has caused great unease and is disturbing for these employees who do not have access to remote or teleworking options. Additionally, the current backlog has caused many agencies to institute mandatory overtime, requiring employees to work within close distances of coworkers for longer periods of time, further increasing their risk of transmission. Many of these employees care for dependents who are high risk or may not be eligible for a vaccination.

NFFE 1998 is requesting the following recommendations be reimplemented to support the health and safety of its personnel:

- Immediate deep cleaning in line with CDC recommendations of areas in agencies where an employee with a confirmed positive case of COVID was present for 15 minutes or more.
- All government employees who must report to their agency will be authorized approval for 15 minutes of non-productive time, daily, to clean their desk and surroundings in order to promote and maintain a safe and healthy work environment.
- A return to the past practice of more flexible approval for COVID-19 Administrative Leave will be instituted within Passport Agencies where COVID-19 levels of transmission remain substantial and high.
- Passport Services will continue to authorize Weather and Safety Leave for employees who meet the CDC guidelines for higher risk in areas where COVID-19 levels of transmission remain substantial or high, until employee vaccination attestation and weekly testing for unvaccinated employees can be implemented per the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan issued on July 29, 2021

Passport Services employees need more support to maintain the continuity of the mission throughout the uncertainty of the pandemic. By implementing these recommendations, the Department will show support for its employees when they need it most during a period of tremendous pressure.

Sincerely,

/s/

Lee T. Wentz

President, NFFE 1998 IAMAW AFL-CIO