

BRIAN HIGGINS
27TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
BORDER AND MARITIME SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM
AND INTELLIGENCE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM,
NONPROLIFERATION AND TRADE

REVITALIZING OLDER CITIES
TASK FORCE
Co-CHAIR

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3227

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2459 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3306
(202) 226-0347 (FAX)

WESTERN NEW YORK OFFICES:
LARKIN BUILDING
726 EXCHANGE STREET
SUITE 601
BUFFALO, NY 14210
(716) 852-3501
(716) 852-3929 (FAX)

FENTON BUILDING
2 EAST 2ND STREET
SUITE 300
JAMESTOWN, NY 14701
(716) 484-0729
(716) 484-1049 (FAX)
higgins.house.gov

April 25, 2011

Secretary Clinton
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

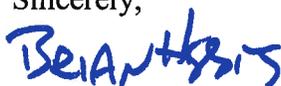
In my letter to you on March 24th of this year and in my comments before the House Foreign Affairs Committee to Deputy Inspector General Geisel I indicated my strong opposition to the State Department mandating local clerk's offices in Western New York to physically separate their facilities for passport acceptance functions in order to continue their eligibility to be a passport issuance facility. I have reviewed the GAO reports that directly investigated these potential security vulnerabilities. I have also reviewed the Department of State's Office of Inspector General report dated July of 2009 in regards to passport offices within the Bureau of Consular affairs. In that report the Department of State Inspector General makes several recommendations including continual training for local issuance officers and monitoring of facilities to track problems or poor performing sites for closure.

While I agree that continued training and monitoring of sites will result in better more efficient services, nowhere in the report's recommendations does it raise a security concern necessitating physically separated facilities to ensure the legitimacy of the passport issuance function. In addition the need to have separate staffing to divide passport issuance staff from performing other functions in a facility is neither specified in the report nor is it feasible to municipal clerk offices that cannot afford to designate separate staff or move to a different location to maintain their passport issuance status.

I agree with the goal of having a secure and well maintained system to issue passports that meet the needs of those in my community to travel and conduct their business. However, these overly burdensome mandates on local municipalities will cripple their ability perform these essential services and will result in making passport services less accessible to the Western New Yorkers who depend on them. I am requesting an extension of the May 1 deadline pending a review and response to my previous letter. I further hope you reconsider these excessive mandates and

ultimately suspend the separate staff and space requirements which seem to exceed the appropriate security requirements given the report recommendations and outstanding record of service and standards demonstrated by municipal clerks serving as local passport agents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress