

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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July 26, 2021

The Honorable David S. Ferriero  
Archivist of the United States  
National Archives and Records Administration  
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20408

Dear Archivist Ferriero:

We write to urge the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to apply for funding through the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) to assist with clearing the backlog of records requests for veterans at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC).

The TMF is designed to allow agencies to “reimagine and transform the way they use technology to deliver their mission and services to the American public in an effective, efficient, and secure manner.”<sup>1</sup> NARA is responsible, along with the Office of Management and Budget, for managing the entire executive branch transition to electronic records by 2022. It is important that NARA serve as a model and not fall behind. We urge NARA to apply for additional financial and technical support through the TMF to address the NPRC backlog and accelerate the information technology (IT) modernization efforts of NARA.

Veterans require access to records housed at NPRC to receive certain service-related benefits, including medical treatment, unemployment assistance, home loans, and student loans.<sup>2</sup> Because of workplace restrictions implemented during the coronavirus pandemic, NPRC has been unable to process thousands of nonemergency records requests. At a briefing on June 9, 2021, NARA reported to Members that this backlog stood at nearly 500,000 unprocessed pending requests for records that are required for veterans to access critical services.<sup>3</sup>

In a recent letter to Congress, you detailed significant steps NARA has taken to expedite the processing of records requests. NARA has hired over 100 additional staff and has doubled

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<sup>1</sup> General Services Administration, *Technology Modernization Fund: Mission & Guiding Principles* (online at <https://tmf.cio.gov/mission/>) (accessed on June 20, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, *Press Release: National Personnel Records Center Prepares for Expansion of Onsite Workforce* (Mar. 8, 2021) (online at [www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2021/nr21-30](http://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2021/nr21-30)).

<sup>3</sup> Briefing by Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero and Chief Operating Officer William J. Bosanko, National Archives and Records Administration, and Director Scott A. Levins, National Personnel Records Center, to Members, House Committee on Oversight and Reform and House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (June 9, 2021).

the number of contractors. You reported that as a result of these and other improvements, NPRC is processing up to 22,000 requests each week.<sup>4</sup>

These steps are important, but further action is needed. In particular, NARA could more quickly process the NPRC backlog with modernized IT systems. NARA has identified the need to digitize records as one of the biggest hurdles to addressing the backlog of veterans' requests.<sup>5</sup> Congress has provided substantial financial support for NARA to reach this goal. Although NARA has taken some steps to begin digitization, more significant action is needed to improve the agency's IT infrastructure.

In March 2020, Congress provided NARA's Federal Records Center Program \$8.1 million in CARES Act funding to assist the program in "preventing, preparing for, and responding to coronavirus."<sup>6</sup> According to a letter you sent to Congress in March, NARA used a portion of these funds to purchase more than 200 laptop computers to facilitate the remote processing of records at NPRC.<sup>7</sup>

In December 2020, the Consolidated Appropriations Act included \$50 million in emergency appropriations that NARA could use "to accelerate processing of requests for military service records received during the pandemic."<sup>8</sup> In addition to these funds, the American Rescue Plan provided \$272 million for veterans' claims and appeals processing, including \$150 million that is expected to be provided to the Veteran Benefits Administration to proactively scan and digitize millions of files located at NPRC.<sup>9</sup> Despite this support, NARA predicts that the backlog of veterans' records will not be resolved until the end of fiscal year 2022.<sup>10</sup>

The Modernizing Government Technology Act of 2017, which established the TMF, sought to move the federal government "into a broad, digital-services delivery model that will

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero, National Archives and Records Administration, to Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, et al. (July 19, 2021) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/NARA.210719.Update%20re%20NPRC.pdf>).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*; National Archives and Records Administration, *FY 2022 Congressional Justification* (May 28, 2021) (online at [www.archives.gov/files/about/plans-reports/performance-budget/2022performance-budget.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/files/about/plans-reports/performance-budget/2022performance-budget.pdf)).

<sup>6</sup> Pub. L. No. 116-136, Title V, § 15003 (2020).

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero, National Archives and Records Administration, to Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, et al. (Mar. 3, 2021) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/NARA.210303.Response%20to%20CBM%20re%20Preservation.pdf>).

<sup>8</sup> Pub. L. No. 116-260 (2020).

<sup>9</sup> American Rescue Plan, Pub. L. No. 117-2, Title VIII § 8001; *see also* Letter from Chairman Jon Tester and Ranking Member Jerry Moran, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (March 19, 2021) (online at [www.veterans.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/03-19-21%20Letter%20to%20President%20Biden%20re%20vaccines%20for%20NPRC%20staff%20draft.pdf](http://www.veterans.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/03-19-21%20Letter%20to%20President%20Biden%20re%20vaccines%20for%20NPRC%20staff%20draft.pdf)).

<sup>10</sup> Briefing by Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero and Chief Operating Officer William J. Bosanko, National Archives and Records Administration, and Director Scott A. Levins, National Personnel Records Center, to Members, House Committee on Oversight and Reform and House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (June 9, 2021).

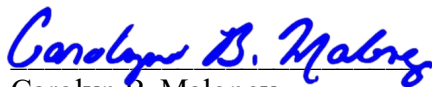
transform the ability of the Federal Government to meet mission requirements and deliver services to the American people.” To accomplish this objective, the law authorized the funding of the TMF to enable federal agencies to improve or replace existing information technology systems; develop, procure, or operate information technology products and services; and provide services or accomplish tasks required of technology systems.<sup>11</sup> The TMF model allows agencies to make vital technology upgrades outside of the normal annualized appropriations process, which can be problematic for agencies in need of longer-term financing for complex IT systems.

The American Rescue Plan provided the TMF with an additional \$1 billion to facilitate much-needed legacy IT improvements across the federal government. In response to a letter sent by Subcommittee on Government Operations Chairman Gerry Connolly, Committee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney, and other Committee members, Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget Shalanda Young and Acting Administrator of the General Services Administration Katy Kale wrote that the Biden Administration intends to prioritize projects for the TMF funding provided by the American Rescue Plan that “improve the public’s ability to access government services.”<sup>12</sup> In establishing guidelines for the prioritization of public-facing digital service projects, the letter laid out several criteria that appear to apply to NPRC, stating:

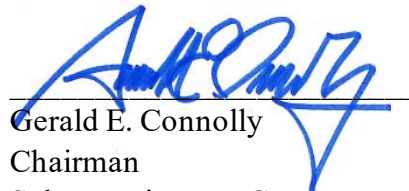
The TMF will support the creation or modernization of digital services with dramatic benefits to increasing access and equity, reducing fraud, and improving service delivery, including core issues exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

We strongly believe that the digitization of NPRC’s records holdings fits both the objective and spirit of the TMF, and we urge NARA to apply for additional assistance through this important program. It is critical that NARA use any and all available tools to ensure we can uphold our commitments to our nation’s veterans.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Oversight and Reform



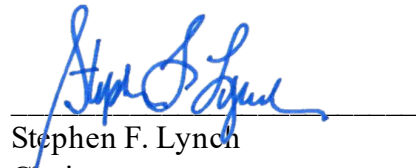
Gerald E. Connolly  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Government  
Operations

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<sup>11</sup> Pub. L. No. 115-91.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Acting Director Shalanda D. Young, Office of Management and Budget, and Acting Administrator Katy Kale, General Services Administration, to Chairman Gerald E. Connolly, Subcommittee on Government Operations, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, et al. (June 29, 2021) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/GSA%20OMB.210628.Response%20to%20GEC%20CBM%20et%20al.%20re%20TMF%20Oversight.pdf>).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*



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