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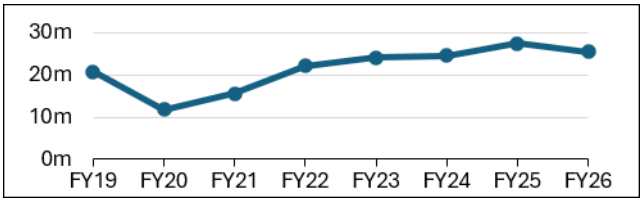
U.S. Passport Services

Updated November 2, 2026

Background

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) defines a passport as "an internationally recognized travel document that verifies the identity and nationality of the bearer." Congress authorizes DOS to grant, issue, and verify U.S. passports. DOS's Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) issued over 5.5 million passports in FY1996. This figure more than doubled by FY2006, reaching over 12 million. In FY2025, CA issued 27.3 million passports, a new annual record (see **Figure 1**). As DOS continues to issue passports, Congress could conduct oversight or enact measures to ensure it implements statutory requirements, including those in the DOS Authorization Act of 2023 (Division F of P.L. 118-31) and the DOS Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 (Division G of P.L. 118-159), to modernize and expand passport services.

Figure 1. U.S. Passports Issued, FY2019-FY2025



Source: State Department, Bureau of Consular Affairs "Reports and Statistics," https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/about-us/reports-and-statistics.html.
Note: m=million.

Passport Fees

Congress authorizes DOS to charge several fees to passport applicants to recover the costs of application processing, passport printing, and other passport services functions. The application fee ($130 for adults) reflects a $28 application filing fee (22 U.S.C. §214(a)(1)), a $22 surcharge to cover costs involved with increased passport demand (22 U.S.C. §214(b)), and an $80 passport security surcharge (8 U.S.C. §1714). Those submitting applications at passport acceptance facilities (such facilities are described in the forthcoming section) are required to pay an additional $35 execution fee (22 U.S.C. §214(a)(1)) that the facility retains to cover the costs it incurs in processing the application. Those seeking to expedite their application are required to pay an additional $60 fee (22 U.S.C. §214 note).

Passport Application, Adjudication, and Processing Steps

Current DOS policies require first-time applicants for a U.S. passport, along with applicants under age 18 seeking to renew their passport, to submit their application in person at a passport acceptance facility. There are over 7,500 passport acceptance facilities across the United States. They include post offices, courts, libraries, and other local government offices. DOS advises those intending to travel in less than three weeks to make an appointment at a passport agency or center (described in the following paragraph) rather than a passport acceptance facility. Adult applicants seeking to renew their passport are generally eligible to do so online or through the mail.

DOS-administered application intake facilities are responsible for opening and sorting passport application packages (sent through the mail or online), processing passport application fees, entering relevant application data into DOS databases, and transmitting application packages to passport agencies and centers for adjudication. CA administers 28 passport agencies and centers across the United States and is implementing plans to open six additional agencies (see **Table 1**). Once a passport application is approved, the application information is electronically transmitted to a print center where the passport is printed. CA maintains two such facilities, located in Hot Springs, AR, and Tucson, AZ. After printing, the passport is mailed to the applicant. In addition to adjudicating applications transmitted from intake facilities, many passport agencies and centers offer in-person passport services by appointment to those who require a passport for urgent international travel needs.

U.S. embassies and other overseas posts also offer passport services to U.S. citizens abroad. Specific procedures vary by post. In some cases, U.S. citizens must apply for all passport services in person at the relevant embassy or consulate, while other posts allow qualified applicants to renew their passport by mail. Similar to passport agencies and centers in the United States, overseas posts offer appointments to U.S. citizens who require a passport for immediate international travel.

Passport Services Expansion and Modernization

Both Congress and DOS have worked to expand passport services. Congress included a provision (Section 6104) in the DOS Authorization Act of 2023 that required the Secretary of State to submit a strategy to Congress describing how DOS could "provide [U.S.] residents living in a significant population center more than a 5-hour drive from a passport agency with urgent, in-person passport services." Then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken submitted a strategy to Congress on June 18, 2024. The strategy revealed DOS's intention to open six new passport agencies across the United States to "enable same-day services within a five-hour drive and/or improve service availability in the areas with the highest unmet … demand." DOS projects that these agencies will open between 2026 and 2028 (for more information, see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Tentative Opening Timelines for New Passport Agencies

Location	Tentative Opening
Charlotte, NC	Fall 2027
Cincinnati, OH	Summer 2027
Kansas City, MO	Winter 2026
Orlando, FL	Fall 2027
Salt Lake City, UT	Winter 2028
San Antonio, TX	2027

Source: DOS Congressional Liaison, November 2, 2026.

Congress has also played a role in shaping DOS passport modernization efforts. Section 7508 of the DOS Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 requires DOS to pursue modernization priorities, including the creation of a mobile app to allow passport applicants to communicate more closely with DOS during the adjudication process; the expansion of eligibility criteria for online passport renewal (OPR) to include most passport applicants, including adults applying for a passport for the first time; and the use of additional tools to adjudicate passport renewals while maintaining human passport authorizing officers. On January 23, 2026, DOS submitted an interim action plan to Congress, as required by Section 7508, describing its efforts to advance these priorities. The report noted that DOS now automatically enrolls applicants who provide their email addresses in their passport applications to receive application status updates. It added that DOS was developing the capability to notify applicants of errors or issues with their applications through electronic information request letters to allow for quicker two-way communications to resolve such issues. The report also described DOS's efforts to pilot a rules-based adjudication module to expedite processing of low-risk applications while maintaining human oversight.

Congress has also expanded its oversight of passport processing. In 2023, U.S. citizens applying for a passport faced delays, as processing times for routine applications increased from 6-9 weeks in January 2023 to 10-13 weeks that March. Some Members of Congress expressed concern regarding processing delays in letters to DOS officials and in budgetary and other DOS-related hearings. In December 2023, DOS announced that it had met its goal of returning processing times to prepandemic levels. Section 6102 of the DOS Authorization Act of 2023 requires DOS to submit quarterly reports to Congress regarding processing times. DOS submitted the most recent report on June 22, 2026. The report said DOS was meeting its processing commitments, which are four to six weeks for routine applications and two to three weeks for expedited applications. It also cited factors underlying DOS's performance, including an increase in adjudicative staffing levels of over 32% since January 2022 and OPR expansion.

Issues for Congress

Online Passport Renewal (OPR) Expansion. DOS made OPR available to the public in September 2024. OPR eases the renewal process by eliminating the need for eligible applicants to obtain physical passport photos, fill out a paper application, and mail these and other materials. OPR eligibility criteria are limited to applicants who are aged 25 or older, renewing a passport that is (or was) valid for 10 years and is either expiring within one year or expired less than five years ago, and located in a U.S. state or territory when submitting an application, among other requirements. A proposed rule published in the *Federal Register* on August 28, 2026, describes DOS's plans to expand OPR eligibility to U.S. citizens abroad and remove the requirement that the applicant's most recently issued passport have a year or less of remaining validity, among other changes. Further, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in September 2026 that beginning in 2027, those applying for their first passport would be able to submit their application online. DOS has noted that first-time applicants would still be required to verify their application in person, as required by law (see 22 U.S.C. §213). As DOS expands OPR, Congress could engage with DOS regarding how such efforts comply with the "world-class cybersecurity standards" Congress called for in Section 7508 and whether the statutory requirement that first-time applicants verify their application in person remains necessary.

Sex and Gender Markers on Passports. On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order (EO) 14168, which ordered Secretary Rubio to ensure passports reflected "an individual's immutable biological classification as either male or female." This reversed the Biden Administration's policy that allowed passport applicants to self-select their gender and provided for a third "X" gender marker for those of an "unspecified or another gender identity." In *Orr v. Trump*, transgender and nonbinary citizens alleged that the new policy violated the Constitution and the Administrative Procedure Act. A decision on the merits is pending. Congress could choose to weigh in on this issue legislatively.

Passport Acceptance Facility Eligibility. A press report indicated that in fall 2025, DOS began informing nonprofit public libraries in the United States that they were no longer eligible to serve as passport acceptance facilities because, according to DOS, federal law prohibited them from doing so. Some Members of Congress introduced legislation to authorize the Secretary of State to designate nonprofit public libraries as passport acceptance facilities. One such bill passed the House in July 2026 (see Section 7064(c)(5)). As Congress considers this legislation, Members could seek to determine how, if at all, DOS's actions have affected the availability of passport services.

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