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One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

October 8, 2020

The Honorable Brian Bulatao
Undersecretary of State for Management
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Mr. Bulatao:

With less than thirty days before the United States' presidential election, I write to urge to you to ensure the Department is taking all possible steps to support the return of overseas American citizens' election ballots. American citizens living overseas have long had the opportunity to return their election ballots to the United States via our diplomatic missions abroad. In coordination with the Department of Defense-led Federal Voting Assistance Program and the U.S. Postal Service, these State Department diplomatic missions help ensure the ballots' safe and timely return to their respective states. In any election year, this is a vital service for U.S. citizens, including U.S. government personnel stationed at our embassies and consulates, who live in locations without functioning or reliable mail systems and who might otherwise might not have a readily available way to return their ballots. This year, it will be all the more so, as COVID-19 has disrupted many of the international transport links we take for granted, including those necessary for international mail and courier services. This only heightens the importance of the Department having robust plans in place to support the return of ballots and to mitigate COVID-related impacts on its ability to do so.

My staff have received regular updates from the Bureau of Consular Affairs and Bureau of Administration on this issue in recent weeks, which I greatly appreciate. But I want to take this moment to personally urge you and other relevant officials in the Department to continue to do everything possible to achieve the following:

- Ensure all posts can send shipments via the unclassified diplomatic pouch system, which is the current standard method used by the Department for returning ballots.

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- Ensure that all posts have back-up plans in place to return ballots if they are unable to return them via the unclassified diplomatic pouch system due to unexpected international mail or transit challenges.
- In posts where unclassified diplomatic pouch services are not available, seek cooperation from host governments, international courier services, and/or air transportation contractors to ensure that no overseas American voters are left disenfranchised because of where they are located.
- Ensure that American citizens will be able to access diplomatic missions that may not otherwise be open for public appointments due to COVID-19, in order to securely deposit their ballots for return.
- Ensure that all posts are regularly communicating specific procedures and deadlines for ballot return to overseas American citizen populations in their respective countries.

Few issues are of greater importance to Americans than exercising their right to safely and securely vote. The Department's work in this regard is critical, and I would ask that you remain in constant communication with me and my staff on this important issue as the 2020 election approaches.

I thank you for your prompt attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman