

November 10, 2009

Hon. John Berry, Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Director Berry,

As labor unions representing federal workers, we are writing regarding federal telework policies throughout the federal government. In that regard, we would like to thank you for the public statements you have made in support of a robust and working telework program available to civilian workers. We share your belief that telework will prove to be of extreme value to both the federal government and federal employees.

The benefits surrounding telework are numerous. Specifically, the advantages to the government and to taxpayers include generally higher employee performance ratings, lower labor turnover rates, a greater sense of pride among employees, and reduced need (and cost) for office space. In addition, and as was recommended by the Federal Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (FACOSH), an efficiently operating federal telework program is necessary for continuity of operations in the event of national emergencies and pandemics such as the H1N1 outbreak. The benefits to employees include an improved quality of life due to a better work/family balance, reduced carbon footprint, reduced travel expenses, and reduced commute time.

Unfortunately, the many positives of a healthy telework program have not resulted in the ability of most federal workers to enjoy this benefit. Numerous legislative efforts by Congress, and other attempts to increase telework in the government by our organizations, have yet to prove successful. In fact, data gathered by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) indicates that only 5% of federal employees currently telework. However, we are hopeful that given your support for telework we can finally put in place a working telework program. In that regard, our labor organizations would like to work with you to ensure that your efforts of providing meaningful telework opportunities to federal workers are a success.

Creating and implementing a successful telework program would obviously require the involvement of the unions representing federal workers. We can provide unique insights into identifying employees that are best suited for telework. In particular, union representatives should have a strong presence on the advisory group to formulate telework policy standards and assist agencies in formulating their telework policies.

In response to your five-point plan proposal, and in addition to our interest in participating in the telework advisory group, we would like to offer our initial input as to a framework for the design of a telework program. The items that we urge you to consider are as follows:

- All federal employees and their unions should be made fully aware of what teleworking options are available, and the potential benefits of such programs.
- Resources should be made available so that federal managers, at all levels, are fully educated on telework policies, and trained as to their responsibilities for granting legitimate telework requests.

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- Management should be encouraged to negotiate telework procedures with the elected representatives of unionized federal workers, thereby providing meaningful employee input into such policies through negotiations.
- Employees identified as eligible to telework should receive training to maximize their productivity and ensure the success of the program.
- IT procurement policies should dovetail with the goal of increasing the number of teleworkers. Employees eligible for telework need to have access to the tools needed to expand the programs.
- Annual reviews of successful teleworking programs should be performed and shared so programs that are working can be replicated.

Thank you for taking the time to review and consider our initial input. We look forward to working together to ensure that telework is a success. Should you wish to discuss this further, please contact International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE) Legislative Director, Matt Biggs, at (202) 239-4880.

Sincerely,

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW)
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), AFL-CIO
Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO
National Association of Government Employees (NAGE)
National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE)