



**CONGRESSIONAL  
TESTIMONY**

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO**

**PROVIDED TO THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM**

**HEARING ON  
Coronavirus Preparedness and Response  
March 11, 2020**

We urge you to recognize that workers who provide patient care and those who are emergency responders must be accorded the highest priority for disease prevention measures including but not limited to the provision of the most effective personal protective equipment (PPE). These measures must also include making sure that agencies have enough equipment and materials, and providing workers with the highest quality of PPE.

There will likely be a national shortage of M95 charcoal and paper respirators. M95 respirators are only safe to wear and use once within a 24-hour period as they are at risk of developing mold after just one day of wear. We have also received reports that agencies still do not have an adequate number of white respirator germ free suits for coronavirus response. AFGE finds the recent CDC guidance allowing the use of surgical masks instead of respirators extremely concerning. As we learn more about the ways COVID-19 spreads, the CDC and federal agencies must make certain that all federal employees potentially exposed to the virus have the necessary PPE. Congress must ensure that the recent funding provided by H.R. 6074 reaches the frontline responders and federal employees required to interact with the public as they perform their duties.

### **Telework**

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has provided only vague instructions in three successive efforts to communicate the administration's plans for the federal workforce.

AFGE is extremely concerned that safety protocols have not been sufficiently communicated to the front-line workforce. Agencies are not communicating with their workforces with enough information or to a degree that will allow them to protect themselves or the public in a timely manner to contain the spread of this virus. In most cases, employees have only been given a link to the Centers for Disease Control website, told to monitor the news and stay home if they do not feel well. Agencies must establish a system of regular communication with workers and their union representatives that will allow us to provide feedback and update agency leadership on the needs of the work force as the COVID-19 response continues to develop.

AFGE represents employees at Travis Air Force Base in California and Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland in Texas, where Americans who have been re-patriated after overseas exposure have

## **Compensation**

For the workers who are first responders, law enforcement officers, TSOs, or hold positions with substantial work related contact with the general public and telework is not practicable, we ask the Committee to strongly encourage agencies to implement policies like the long-established precedent at the VA with Agent Orange, that if employees are exposed, there is a presumption that the virus was contracted at work. As such, a frontline worker will have access through the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA) to full coverage of related medical treatment and for wage loss or disability related to that condition or associated complications from the illness. All federal employees who are in positions where they may be exposed to COVID-19 should have rapid access to screening at no cost.

We are concerned that workers who provide direct patient care and emergency services to individuals who have contracted COVID-19 lack clear, specific guidance and effective preventive equipment and gear to protect themselves from contracting the virus. In cases where workers are exposed to unusual hazards, current law provides for a pay differential, or hazardous duty pay. Because these workers are in immediate danger of exposure, and current protocols have no guarantees of protection, employees required to work and interface with individuals who have been quarantined or diagnosed with COVID-19 should be provided hazardous duty pay.

AFGE recognizes that COVID-19 is spreading rapidly and that requirements of agencies, and especially of the frontline workforce may change. We thank the Committee for its ongoing and diligent oversight as you work to protect the federal workforce and the American public.

Thank you for your consideration.