



March 7, 2023

The Honorable James Comer
Chairman
The Honorable Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Comer and Ranking Member Raskin:

On behalf of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to better government and stronger democracy, I am writing to submit this letter for the record in connection with the House Oversight and Accountability Committee's hearing "Oversight of Our Nation's Largest Employer: Reviewing the U.S. Office of Personnel Management."

We applaud the Committee's focus on the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as a key driver in ensuring that our federal workforce can respond to current and future challenges. It is important to note that these dedicated public servants are performing mission-critical work in your districts and across the country – at least 80% of federal employees work outside the region of DC, Maryland, and Virginia. To effectively serve our government's nearly two million federal employees and ensure that we have robust talent management across government, it is crucial to have a strong and well-resourced OPM.

For years, the good government community has called for a revitalized OPM. Congress has moved on this issue as well, directing the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) to produce a study on opportunities to enhance and transform OPM's role as government's human capital leader. OPM has taken substantive steps to address recommendations in the NAPA report and undertake other forward-looking efforts; however, more can be done to strengthen its role as government's human capital leader.

To ensure that OPM is able to work effectively with agencies toward a more robust talent management function, policies and tools must be resourced and updated. Members of this Committee have already demonstrated a bipartisan interest in improving the federal hiring process and enacting skills-based reforms by passing the Chance to Compete Act of 2023. We applaud this bipartisan effort and offer the following suggestions as future areas of focus.

Agencies need well-trained and well-resourced human resources offices, aided by effective technologies and processes, to effectively recruit, develop and retain talent. Strategic human capital management has been on GAO's high-risk list for over two decades, while skills gaps across government continue to impact agencies' abilities to deliver on their missions. OPM plays a key role in communicating government-wide flexibilities, convening human capital leaders, and providing technical support and training for HR professionals. Congress should ensure that human capital functions are well-resourced by appropriating sufficient funding to these efforts and ensuring that OPM provides skills development and standards for HR professionals.

Another key issue involves dealing with workers who do not meet the expectations of the job. OPM's 2021 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) found that only 42% of federal



employees believe that steps are taken in their work unit to deal with poor performers who cannot or will not improve. One way to address this problem would be to ensure agencies make effective use of the “probationary period” for employees, during which a manager decides whether an employee is the right fit for the job. Too often, the probationary period passes without a clearly articulated, documented decision on the employee’s performance. Congress should require, with OPM regulatory support, that supervisors affirmatively determine that employees meet the required standards – if they do not, termination proceedings would follow.

Finally, more can be done to strengthen federal performance management. OPM can lead the way by equipping agencies with the necessary tools to develop highly competent managers who can effectively carry out governmental processes and contribute positively to their agency’s organizational health. Congress should also mandate training for supervisors and managers, so they are equipped to lead, engage, and develop talent. We recommend requiring specific training on how to manage a hybrid workforce, as well as how to build and lead diverse, equitable and inclusive teams – all of which can lead to better organizational and mission outcomes.

To continue building a federal workforce capable of tackling current and future challenges, Congress should broaden its focus to other core civil service issues, which will require a whole-of-government approach. Below are a handful of areas ripe for bipartisan support this Congress:

- **Get more young people into government:** With less than 7% of the federal workforce under age 30—compared to almost 20% in the broader U.S. labor force—government needs to focus on this gap. Among other things, Congress could build stronger entry-level talent pipelines by ensuring that internships are paid, easing the ability of agencies to convert effective interns (including those from third-party programs) into full-time employees and expanding expedited hiring authorities Congress recently created for students and recent college graduates.
- **Create high expectations for federal leaders:** Government leaders should be held accountable for the organizational health and stewardship of their agencies. Congress should require leadership training and strong performance standards for career and political leaders to ensure they best meet their agency’s mission. To start, Congress should direct OPM to update the Executive Core Qualifications and identify modern leadership standards – our Public Service Leadership Model offers one such example.
- **Build a modern, customer-focused government:** Many government services, processes and systems are difficult to use and vulnerable to disruption. Congress should support technological modernization and a customer-focused workforce across all of government by making it easier for agencies to acquire and use emerging technologies, revising the Paperwork Reduction Act to remove barriers to agencies’ collection of voluntary customer experience data, and ensuring federal programs and services are reliable, accessible and easy.

We appreciate the Committee’s attention to civil service issues and your efforts to strengthen the Office of Personnel Management. The Partnership looks forward to supporting the Committee’s efforts and working together on these important issues in the future.

Sincerely,



Max Stier
President and CEO
Partnership for Public Service