

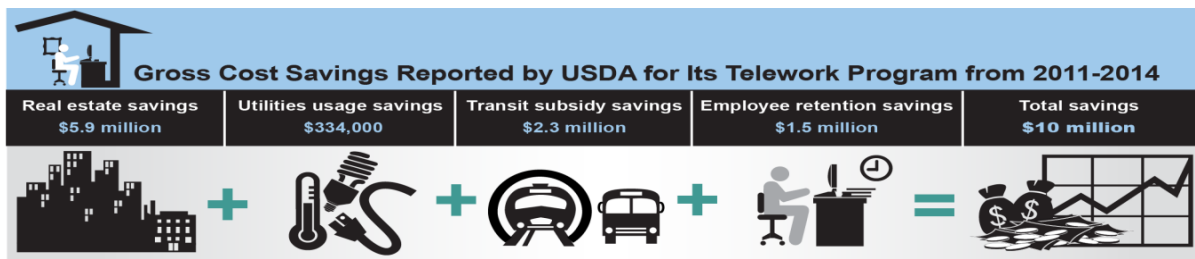
Statement for the Record
of Mika J. Cross
Federal Workplace Expert and Workplace Transformation Strategist
**“Oversight of Our Nation’s Largest Employer:
Reviewing the U.S. Office of Personnel Management”**
Before The
Committee on Oversight and Accountability Hearing
March 9, 2023

I wish to thank all the distinguished members of this committee for taking the time to consider this written statement for the record, as it is my belief that there is no greater risk to our nation’s economy and future growth than the ongoing talent shortages and retention issues we face today.

This is why effective recruitment, hiring, and retention is a top priority for every business owner, employer, and **ESPECIALLY for the Federal government.**

From 2010-2015, I was the telework program manager for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. During my tenure, I created and managed [numerous award-winning](#) work/life and wellness programs that received recognition and awards. These programs were proven to be successful and impactful, and as a result, [Forbes Best American Workplaces](#) consistently named the USDA as one of the best American workplaces since 2014.

Figure 6: Gross Cost Savings Reported by USDA for Its Telework Program from 2011-2014



Source: GAO analysis of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) information. | GAO-16-551

In my career as an active-duty military member and federal employee, I have worked in various agencies, including the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Department of Labor, as well

Written statement for the record of Mika J. Cross on Oversight of our Nation’s Largest Employer:
Reviewing the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, submitted March 8, 2023

as the U.S. intelligence community. Through these experiences, I have witnessed the positive effects of well-executed telework programs.

In 2018, I left the federal government for the fully remote company, FlexJobs, working with the nation's [top remote-friendly employers](#) from academia, non-profit, and private industry, as vice president of employer engagement.

The intent of my written statement is to offer critical insights and recommendations to help inform this committee to make the policy decisions that will strengthen and empower the workforce strategy for the nation's largest employer. I am also including a visual statement for the record in the form of a PDF presentation for your review.

Federal employees have had [the option to work from alternate worksites](#) since 1934, essentially participating in what we now call hybrid work. However, over the nearly 100 years they have used this flexibility, agencies have not been given the investment to measure and compare the effectiveness of in-office work to work done remotely.

This is the issue the SHOW Up Act will not be able to address effectively.

Moreover, the Act's requirement for agencies to revert to their 2019 telework policies, practices, and levels may lead to even greater risks for the federal government in terms of delivering efficient services to the public. This could lead to negative impacts on recruitment, retention, engagement, and productivity of the Federal workforce.

Notable Improvements in Tracking Telework Data and ROI

According to OPM's "Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress" published in December 2022, agencies have improved their ability to track and report cost-savings by 20% over the past two years.

In fact, as of the 2022 report, **72% of Federal agencies were able to set and track telework goals** to measure the impact on key operational areas, which saw significant improvements, including:

- **employee recruitment (59%)**
- **employee retention (51%)**
- **employee attitudes (58%)**
- **reduced employee absences (16%)**

Agencies that could not track cost savings reported a lack of access to cost-savings tracking systems as the primary reason.

If agencies lack the proper systems or skilled program managers to effectively manage the telework programs, they will not be able to analyze or reliably report on the “negative impacts” as required by the SHOW Up Act.

Moreover, there is **no standard productivity or performance measure for in-office work across the government that can demonstrate if the implied mission impacts are because of the location** federal workers are working from.

In 2021, the USDA compiled a [Telework Survey Insights Report](#) to collect insights around key areas necessary to improve its efficiency, culture, and morale. Below are the highlights to show how other Agencies might monitor and assess their telework programs' impact, cost-savings, and results:

- 86% of employees indicated the increased telework during the pandemic has been an overwhelming success.
- 76% of employees do not expect a return to a pre-pandemic state of working, rather they would prefer a mix of in-person and virtual settings.
- 78% of employees agreed their USDA-issued equipment needs for telework were met.
- The move to more telework during and post-pandemic has been a huge success for most employees - indicating a strong business case for

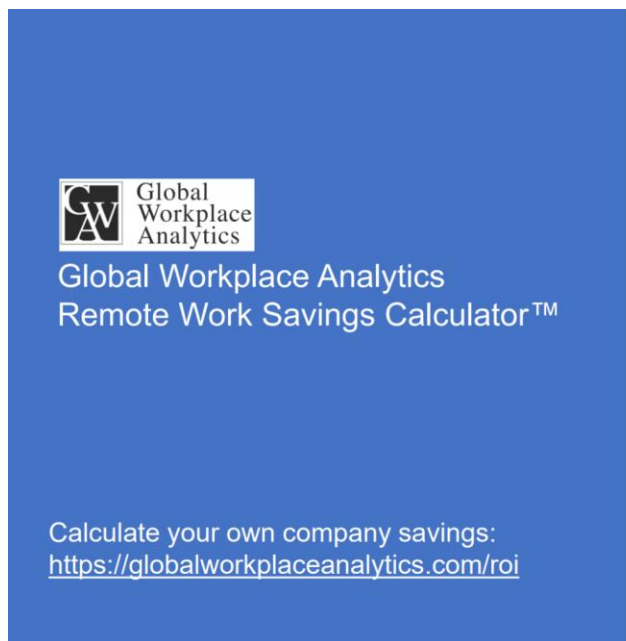
maintaining a hybrid work model. Key highlights of the open-ended feedback revealed numerous benefits of telework:

- Enhanced productivity.
- Improved physical and mental health.
- Noticeable time and cost savings, including a better work-life balance.

*Reference of [Telework Survey Insights Report 2021 \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/telework-survey-insights-report-2021)

Using the Global Workplace Analytics Mobile/Remote/Hybrid [Workplace Savings Calculator](#), Kate Lister and I assessed productivity and cost savings for a 31-person U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office that shifted to permanent remote work, in 2021. We found that because of increased productivity, improved retention, reduced office space, and other factors, **the office would save \$1 million yearly.**

See below chart as an example below:



Annual Employer Savings 31 ICE Teleworkers

Productivity	\$730k
Real Estate	\$118k
Absenteeism	\$ 68k
Retention	\$ 36k
Continuity of Operations	\$ 22k
Transit Subsidies	\$ 14k

**Total \$988,000
\$32k/person**

Comparing Telework Eligibility and Participation

Even though agencies had a maximum telework posture during FY 2021, they reported **only very slight increases in eligibility and participation** rates compared to the OPM Telework report of FY 2020.

- An overall 2% uptick of all Federal employees participating in telework was reported.
- Employees deemed eligible for telework increased a minimal 4%.

Here is a **comparison of telework levels before the pandemic in 2019 and during the pandemic**, along with how that correlates to data for Federal workers based in Washington, D.C. It demonstrates the relatively small percentage of Federal workers affected by a push to return to the office:

Fiscal Year	Total Number of Federal Employees	Total Number of Telework-Eligible Employees	Total Number of Teleworking Employees (as reported each FY+ month of Sep)	Total Number of DC-based Employees (as of Sep each FY)	Estimated Avg. total of DC-based Feds Teleworking (per each FY)	Estimated % of Federal Employees that a DC-based Return-to-Office Work Applies to
FY19	2,184,740	907,813	503,251	168,499	38,813	1.8%
FY20	2,244,199	1,015,115	1,055,336	171,292	80,550	3.6%
FY21	2,271,961	956,616	1,076,034	171,148	81,058	3.6%

*Sources: Fedscope Employment Trends in DC area comparison: [Employment Trend \(Year-to-Year\) - IBM Cognos PowerPlay Studio \(opm.gov\)](#) and the Fiscal Year 2021 "Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress" published in December 2022

The Future Forum Winter Pulse Survey (published in Feb 2023) found that **two-thirds of all workers (67%) say they prefer a hybrid arrangement** with the option to access a physical space.

If we applied this level of preference, to Federal teleworkers, then:

- 32% of the total workforce would likely choose working in a hybrid work arrangement.
- Only 16% of the total Federal workforce would likely choose full-time telework (remote) work.

*Source: [Future Forum Pulse Winter Snapshot - Future Forum](#)

Worker Productivity

According to a recent [Deloitte report](#), employees were [more productive during the pandemic](#), especially when working remotely or in hybrid arrangements.

The report also emphasizes the need to develop better ways of measuring productivity that reflect how people now perform work. It encourages employers to:

- prioritize **outcomes over outputs**.
- **avoid using outdated approaches to measuring “quantifiable” results such as measurements of units** and/or deliverables completed,
- **stop measuring productivity solely based on physical presence and hours worked** by watching over a sea of workers, cubicles, and offices.

*Source: [Exploring Remote Work Productivity | Deloitte US](#)

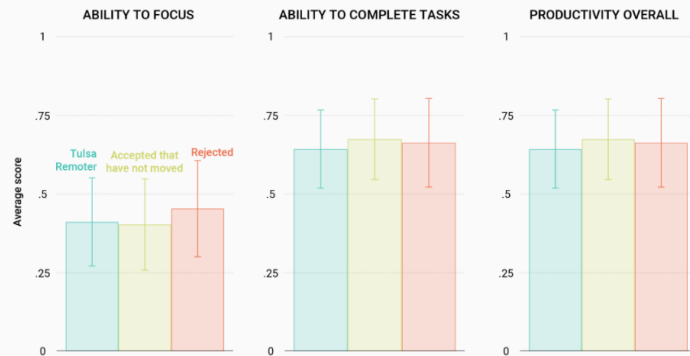
In fact, if physical presence and office occupancy are metrics Congress wants for the Federal government, I suggest you add them to the performance measures on Performance.gov and into the performance plans and job descriptions so Federal workers understand how to measure success.

If we change how we measure the productivity of the Federal government, moving away from traditional input/output metrics that do not align with modern work practices, we can improve performance and customer experience. **By focusing on outcomes**, we can prioritize the "how" and the impact of the work over when and where it's done.

FIGURE 5

Tulsa Remoters reported an increase in productivity similar to other groups

Average responses to questions, "Compared to three years ago, how has your (a) ability to focus, (b) ability to complete tasks, and (c) productivity overall changed over the past 3 years?" (answer in a -3 to +3 scale, from much less productive to much more productive)



Note: Bars represent mean difference across groups and caps represent the 95% confidence interval around the mean of each group. Confidence intervals were computed after implementing a simple ordinary least square model controlling for the range of covariates described on Figure 1.

B Economic Studies
at BROOKINGS

In the [“Work From Anywhere as a Public Policy” report](#) from the Brookings Institute, remote workers who participated in the Tulsa Remote program cited much higher productivity when compared to other workers.

*Source: [Brookings Work from Anywhere as a Public Policy report](#), September 15, 2022

In addition, the Federal government can benefit from the [World Economic Forum](#) research that emphasizes the need for significant upskilling to prepare for jobs in the digital age.

This underscores the importance of the Federal government digitizing more of its work processes and modernizing its practices to avoid the challenges of the ability to process paper-based records or receive mail, when and if another public emergency arises. This is essential for the continuity of the government and to remain competitive and lead in the modern workplace.

Digitizing and modernizing work in the Federal government can shift focus from low-value to high-value work that benefits American taxpayers.

Physical Office Space Considerations

The federal government’s lease portfolio includes over 187 million square feet of office space. That equals \$5.7 billion in rent, every year.

In January 2023, more than thirty federal agencies participated in a commercial coworking trial week in Denver, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., with the goal of helping Federal Agencies create innovative workspaces to maximize productivity, by gaining a better understanding of the benefits and challenges.

The coworking trial showed Federal workers benefited from:

- Ability to work at various locations and the availability of locations are closer to home.
- Ability to work alongside employees from other federal agencies.
- More modern office space than traditional federal offices that is energizing and motivational.

Federal workers reported challenges such as:

- Commute to a site (same as Federal offices).
- Lack of affordable/convenient parking,
- Noisy common work areas.
- IT/security concerns, including lack of access to monitors and inability to leave Federal laptop/government-furnished-equipment unattended -- even for breaks.

*Source- (Jan 2023 - [Lessons learned from commercial coworking pilot - Workplace \(gsa.gov\)](#))

The top two reasons employees want to work in the office, according to the Future Forum Winter Pulse Survey, are **collaboration (33%) and building camaraderie (23%)**. So, for relationships and social team building, not for performing desk-based knowledge, work more efficiently.

As metropolitan areas like Washington, D.C., [seek strong mandates to return Federal teleworkers to a physical office](#), it's important to remember that most federal workers do not live and work in metropolitan areas like Washington, D.C.

Rural areas and small cities can benefit by attracting remote workers and designing existing office space as co-working spaces that improve productivity and engagement, as GSA's co-working pilot cited.

The ability to bring more Federal job opportunities to rural communities nationwide could enhance community resilience, reduce and reverse the rural brain drain, boost economic growth, and enhance recruitment and retention for Federal jobs.

Written statement for the record of Mika J. Cross on Oversight of our Nation's Largest Employer:
Reviewing the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, submitted March 8, 2023

[Tulsa, Oklahoma](#), has seen benefits from its approach to attracting remote workers to relocate there. Other areas could learn from this if the Federal government allowed current remote workers to relocate if they wanted to. The [Brookings Work from Anywhere as a Public Policy report](#), found that remote workers can increase their purchasing power by moving from expensive metropolitan areas to more affordable cities.

Recruitment of Next-Gen Federal Talent

During the peak of the pandemic, with high unemployment and significant job losses, interest in Federal positions increased by 2.8%, as measured by daily visits to USAJOBS.gov. This surge in interest may be linked to the rise in remote-friendly Federal positions offered during that period.

*Source: Partnership for Public Service analysis of analytics.usa.gov API • Get the data

PwC Case Study for Flexible Career Paths

During the pandemic, PwC provided its 40,000 client service professionals with the option of location flexibility. Of those who chose, 80% preferred a hybrid arrangement, while the rest went for fully virtual.

This resulted in a 20% surge in job applications to the firm.

Across the private sector, remote-friendly jobs are spiking. From 2021 to 2022, the [FlexJobs site](#) saw a 20% uptick in the number of remote job listings on the site, compared with just 12% the previous year. From 2021 to 2022, [FlexJobs saw more than double the increase](#) in hybrid job listings.

The top careers for remote jobs include:

1. Computer & IT
2. Marketing
3. Accounting & Finance

Written statement for the record of Mika J. Cross on Oversight of our Nation's Largest Employer:
Reviewing the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, submitted March 8, 2023

4. Project Management
5. Medical & Health
6. HR & Recruiting
7. Customer Service

Critical Insights from (Frontline) Workers

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) presented research on “deskless” workers at an event hosted by the Partnership for Public Service in March 2023. These deskless workers are the workers who need to be physically present to do their jobs -- and who also happen to be at the highest risk of quitting their jobs.

According to the analysis of the BCG Future of Work Deskless Worker Survey, **43% of deskless workers in government -- as compared with 37% in the private sector -- say they may leave their jobs within six months.** For half of these workers, lack of flexibility or work-life balance is the reason for intending to leave.

BCG research also shows that younger deskless workers are more likely to quit their jobs than older workers. In fact, 48% of Gen Z workers indicate they plan to leave, compared to 35% of Gen Y and 32% of Gen X.

Here are the other top reasons deskless workers say they want to leave their jobs:

- lack of career advancement (41%)
- pay (30%)
- lack of enjoyment in their current position (15%)
- lack of recognition for their contributions (14%).

*Sources: BCG Future of Work Deskless Worker Survey (March-April 2022), BCG Analysis

In May 2022, the U.S. Surgeon General also warned the resignation rates among frontline healthcare workers because of burnout. This could lead to a **shortage of over 3 million essential low-wage health workers in the next five years and a shortage of almost 140,000 physicians by 2033.**

Written statement for the record of Mika J. Cross on Oversight of our Nation’s Largest Employer:
Reviewing the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, submitted March 8, 2023

*Source: [New Surgeon General Advisory Sounds Alarm on Health Worker Burnout and Resignation | HHS.gov](#)

We can see how this is playing out in the Federal government with the **attrition rates in health occupations (7.1%), a full percentage higher than the government-wide average**, in fiscal year 2021. For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs had the highest attrition rate (of 7.1%) in fiscal year 2021, which was higher than the government-wide average.

This mirrors trends in the private sector, where low morale and pandemic-related stress have caused an [estimated 20% of health care workers to leave their positions](#) in just over two years.

What to Watch: The Great Resignation and Government

The government-wide attrition rate for employees under 30 was 8.5% in fiscal year 2021, significantly higher than the government-wide average of 6.1%. Attrition rates in early-career levels (GS-4 and under) rose to 14.5%.

Attrition for employees with under five years of service was 7.1% and mostly made up of resignations (quits.)

Quits and retirements by age

The attrition rate for employees under 49 is made up mostly of quits while the rate for those over 50 is comprised mostly of retirements.



Chart: Partnership for Public Service • Source: [FedScope](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

*Source: [Who is quitting and retiring: Important fiscal 2021 trends in the federal government • Partnership for Public Service \(ourpublicservice.org\)](#)

These findings correspond with the “Employment by Industry” report published by the Department of Labor Statistics, which found that 600,000 public sector workers left their jobs between January 2020 and January 2022.

Written statement for the record of Mika J. Cross on Oversight of our Nation’s Largest Employer:
Reviewing the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, submitted March 8, 2023

An Uncertain Future-of-Work

Thanks to generous work schedule flexibilities, leave options, and increased telework and remote work, Federal agencies protected employee health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

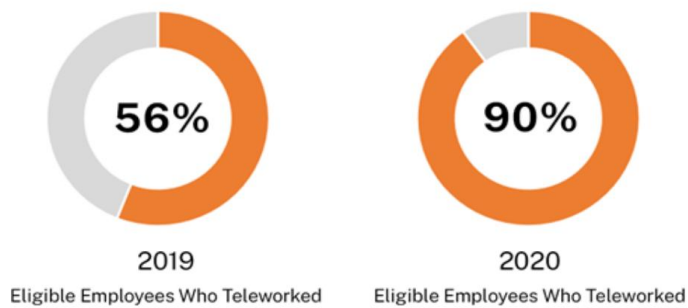
Despite operating under a maximum telework posture for the duration of FY 2021, agencies reported very small increases in eligibility and participation rates since the FY 2020 OPM Telework report.

- Federal agencies reported only a 2% climb of all employees participating in telework in fiscal year 2021, from the previous year in FY20, resulting in a total of 47%. (OPM Dec 2022)
- Agencies also reported a minimal 4% rise in the total numbers of employees deemed eligible for telework, in fiscal year 2021. (OPM Dec 2022)

What were the results?

Although 48% of employees reportedly faced increased work demands because of the pandemic, the 2020 FEVS scores were among the highest in five years. However, the 2021 FEVS report reveals federal workers were not as optimistic about returning to the office after the pandemic, which OPM largely attributes to an 11% decrease in full-time telework.

The drop in daily telework levels was accompanied by a decrease in how civil servants view their agencies and jobs, as shown by the FEVS employee engagement and satisfaction score, which decreased 4.5 points from 2020.



The future of work

84% agree that their agency has the tools/resources needed to successfully respond to future emergencies requiring maximum telework.

86% were able to successfully transition 80% of their workforce to maximum telework.

Source: Fiscal Year 2020 Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress

Recommendations for Consideration

1. Allow flexibility in maximizing workplace strategies that benefit all workers, no matter where they are located.
2. Establish performance and productivity benchmarks for desk-based and deskless workers in different locations, to make informed data-driven comparisons for agencies and the workforce.
3. Find and source the BEST training, coaching, and tools to help equip managers and leaders with the right sets of skills and competencies to manage performance by outcomes through a human-centered approach to leading people.
4. Reinforce #3 above with not just “training” but provide cohort-based management support to address management resistance and hidden bias and boost effective relationship and team-building for supervisors, in addition to training. ***Note: This already exists and can be borrowed and adapted by the successful remote-first employers in every sector that have success in these areas!**
5. Make sure leaders know the difference between conduct and performance issues and train HR professionals to help with these issues in all teams, no matter where they are located.

6. Align telework performance goals with DEIA strategic objectives, facility occupancy, and leased office space reduction/redesign goals.
7. Leverage the resources we already fund in Agencies to help leaders of people lead their teams more effectively, from any location to include:
 - Federal Career Coaching Network
 - Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
 - Office of the Ombuds (for Agencies that fund this)
 - Conflict Resolution/Management Programs
 - EEO/Civil Rights and Diversity Offices
8. Cross-level surplus office equipment and IT/technology devices across the Federal government that can equip, support, and enable worker productivity and efficiencies from any location, especially those who work from home offices.
9. Share widely, the best practices on how Agencies can upgrade their IT security and infrastructure for secure and effective telework at low or no cost through trade-up and trade-in programs.
10. We should also help Agencies invest in resources to develop effective communication and change management practices that enable learning new ways of working and collaborating across distances from any location.

And finally, please reference my [testimony from December 2021](#) and consider the quote I referenced that is inscribed on the Jefferson Memorial, just a few blocks from the location you are likely working from now:

"I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and Constitutions. But laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind.

As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times."

The way to move the needle forward, is not to go back to the way we previous did things more than three years ago.

Since then, millions of future workers in this country (our school-aged children) also learned to adapt to the new remote and hybrid world and they will come to the workforce with new skills and different expectations about what work is and what it is not.

Let's consider leveraging the learnings, discoveries and practices from the pandemic, that will help advance the Federal government for the future and truly position it as a model employer for the rest of the world to follow.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

About Mika J. Cross



Mika J. Cross is a distinguished thought leader and trusted advisor, with expertise in designing and implementing innovative, strategic workplace solutions for enhancing the employee experience and the overall world of work.

Her career began in uniform with the United States Army, having served as both a commissioned officer and enlisted soldier. She is known as a passionate advocate for public service, having served for more than two decades across government.

She wrote and implemented precedent-setting, human capital policy and flexible workplace initiatives within the United States Intelligence Community, post 9/11 and for agencies like USDA, OPM, DOL – among others. Serving as the Vice President of Employer Engagement and Strategic Initiatives at FlexJobs, Mika worked with business executives across private, public, and non-profit sectors to customize their talent management capabilities, establish recruitment/marketing brands and develop workforce planning efforts using flexible and remote jobs to attract, recruit, hire and retain top talent. Known as a Federal Workplace Expert,

Mika was regularly featured on the nationally broadcast show, Government Matters and has highlighted the federal government's flexible work potential in books like *Workshift: Future-Proof Your Organization for the 21st Century* and *The Whole Person Workplace*.

She also volunteers her time to share next and promising practices in a variety of settings, having worked with organizations like the Senior Executives Association, the Greater Washington Board of Trade Connected DMV Work Group, the Advanced Technology Academic Research Center (ATARC) Digital Transformation Work Group/Workforce Transformation Team, and as part of the Ambassador Network for the DoD Military Spouse Employment Partnership, to name a few.

As a native of Maine, Mika is enthusiastic in advocating for ways rural communities can benefit from workforce development and economic development initiatives that bring greater access to remote and flexible jobs.