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January 15, 2025

The Honorable James Comer
Chairman
The Honorable Gerry Connolly
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Comer and Ranking Member Connolly,

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 Government Reform Committee's hearing "The Stay-at-Home Federal Workforce: Another Biden-Harris Legacy."

Flexible work policies are a strategic business tool used by both the public and private sector to enhance an organization's ability to recruit and retain top talent while also achieving potential cost savings. Moreover, federal remote and telework policy represents a long-standing, bipartisan federal workforce strategy that supports our government's ability to effectively deliver services to the American people.

When implemented properly, telework policies can result in vital operational benefits for federal agencies including reducing their real estate footprint, diversifying the geographic reach of federal office workers and improving accessibility to federal jobs for people with disabilities. Telework, remote work and alternative work schedules should be management tools in the federal sector just as they are in the private sector. Instead of focusing on whether employees are working in the office or working at home, agencies should ensure they are capturing performance data and evaluating that telework is used appropriately.

Flexible Work is Longstanding, Bipartisan Workforce Policy

Flexible work policies such as remote and telework are not new to the federal government and have received bipartisan support across many presidential administrations. Federal telework began in 1990 with the original goals to save energy, improve air quality, reduce congestion and stress on the roads and bridges and enhance the quality of family-friendly and other initiatives for federal employees.¹ Bipartisan efforts to expand flexible work continued in 2004 with the Federal Workforce Flexibility Act, which encouraged agencies to adopt telework and remote work policies to attract and retain a skilled workforce.² The bipartisan Telework

¹OPM, [Telework Works: A Compendium of Success Stories](#), May 2001, p. 1

² [Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004](#) | CHCOC



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Enhancement Act of 2010, further enhanced federal workplace efficiency by ensuring operational continuity during emergencies and promoting flexible work arrangements.³

The pandemic forced a reimagining of work across all sectors and industries, leading to an increased desire for flexibility, particularly among younger employees and those in the tech field, where employers offered ample hybrid and remote opportunities. While grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, federal agencies carried out their missions effectively, and federal employees continued to perform their jobs, at the highest level, from locations other than their regular duty station. During this time, agencies relied on their own telework policies, OPM guidance on HR flexibilities, OMB guidance on maximum telework and established Continuity of Operations Policies to enhance their capability to achieve critical outcomes during an unprecedented moment in history.⁴

According to OPM, 79% of agencies reported minimal-to-no barriers inhibiting broadened telework postures during the pandemic and most agencies were able to successfully transition at least 80% of their workforce to maximum telework.⁵

Telework vs. Remote Work

For the federal workforce, there is a distinction between “telework” and “remote work”—terms that in other contexts might seem interchangeable.

Telework: A written work arrangement that allows eligible employees to perform their duties and responsibilities from their agency worksite on some days and from an approved alternative worksite (e.g., from their home) on other days. In private-sector terms, federal telework is the equivalent of hybrid work.⁶ Official travel, temporary duty assignments and routine work at multiple agency worksites are not considered telework in the federal government.⁷

Remote Work: A written arrangement that allows eligible employees to work from an alternative worksite (such as their home) on a full-time basis. Remote workers’ official worksites may be within or outside the local commuting area of their agencies’ worksites.⁸

Roughly Half of the Federal Workforce Is Ineligible to Telework

About half of federal employees are not eligible for telework or remote work because their roles require in-person service.⁹ Many federal employees are already in the “office” 5 days per week—including those that work in national security and healthcare—while others rarely work

³ <https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ292/PLAW-111publ292.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.opm.gov/telework/documents-for-telework/2021-report-to-congress.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.opm.gov/telework/documents-for-telework/2021-report-to-congress.pdf>

⁶ 5 USC 6501(3) and OPM, [2021 Guide to Telework and Remote Work in the Federal Government](#), p. 10

⁷ OPM, [2021 Guide to Telework and Remote Work in the Federal Government](#), p. 11

⁸ OPM, [2021 Guide to Telework and Remote Work in the Federal Government](#), p. 11

⁹ OMB, [OMB Report to Congress on Telework and Real Property Utilization](#), August 2024, p. 8



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at a “desk” because their jobs are in the field, such as food inspectors, national park rangers and law enforcement officers. Alternatively, according to Gallup, only 20% of employees in the private sector work exclusively in-person—far less than federal employees.¹⁰

Private Sector Employees Work Remotely More Often than Federal Employees

A far smaller portion of the federal workforce works remotely than the private-sector workforce. The government estimates that about 7 to 10% of the federal workforce worked remotely in fiscal year 2023.¹¹ In contrast, 28% of full-time, telework-capable employees in the U.S. worked remotely in 2023 according to Gallup.¹²

Telework Eligibility Is Increasing for Federal Workers, However Use is Decreasing

Not all federal employees who are eligible to telework actually telework. Some prefer to work in-person, while others don’t have a suitable alternative worksite, among other reasons. In fiscal year 2023, 57% of the federal workforce was eligible to telework.¹³ This is a 5-point increase from fiscal year 2022, the previous peak in eligibility, and a 10% increase from the pre-pandemic high.¹⁴

While telework eligibility has increased, post-pandemic telework by federal employees is in decline. In fiscal year 2023, only 43% of all employees teleworked some amount—about half on a situational and half on a routine basis. This was a slight decrease from the 47% of federal employees who teleworked in fiscal year 2021, the height of the pandemic when federal and private-sector telework peaked.¹⁵

Federal Workers Spend the Vast Majority of Their Time Working in Person

Even though about half of federal employees are eligible to telework and 43% teleworked some amount in fiscal year 2023, they spend the vast majority of their time working in-person. Nearly 80% of the regular working hours of all federal employees—except remote workers—were in-person in 2024. Moreover, telework-eligible employees worked about 61% of the time in-person.¹⁶

¹⁰ <https://www.gallup.com/401384/indicator-hybrid-work.aspx>

¹¹ OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 15. [OMB Report to Congress on Telework and Real Property Utilization](#), August 2024, p. 8

¹² <https://www.gallup.com/401384/indicator-hybrid-work.aspx>

¹³ OPM’s analysis is based on its survey of more than 80 agencies. OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 12. OMB estimates that 46.4% of civilian personnel were telework-eligible. [OMB Report to Congress on Telework and Real Property Utilization](#), August 2024

¹⁴ OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 12

¹⁵ Of the roughly 626,000 federal employees who completed the 2023 Federal Viewpoint Survey, 54% reported teleworking, even if only “very infrequently.” OPM did not use FEVS data in its December 2024 report to Congress on teleworking.

¹⁶ OMB, [OMB Report to Congress on Telework and Real Property Utilization](#), August 2024, p. 8



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The amount of time federal employees work in the office aligns with their counterparts in the private sector. Americans worked 84% of the time in-person in 2024, Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows.¹⁷

Telework is not an Employee Right, but an Essential Business Tool with Many Operational Benefits

Like the private sector, to recruit and retain top talent the government must think strategically about workplace flexibilities. Telework is not an employee right, but a tool to compete for top talent, maximize productivity and enable employees to work where they are most efficient, especially in mission-critical positions.

Agency Operations and Costs

More than 69% of agencies reported that telework and remote work enhance their resilience during emergencies, such as extreme weather and natural disasters.¹⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how the federal government leveraged these flexibilities to continue its mission-critical work during the height of the national emergency.¹⁹ Additionally, 33% of agencies noted substantial cost savings from telework, with reductions in real estate, transit subsidies, and energy expenses resulting in over \$230 million in savings across the executive branch in fiscal year 2023.²⁰

Customer Experience

55% of federal employees think reducing telework would harm their agencies' customer experience.²¹ Additionally, only 1% of federal agencies believe telework and remote work policies negatively impact their ability to serve customers effectively.²² Analysis of for certain agencies further supports this, showing that frequent teleworkers outperform less frequent or non-teleworkers in accountability and customer responsiveness.²³

Productivity

Increased levels of employee engagement associated with telework and remote work can lead to greater productivity. According to OPM 35% of agencies said telework and remote work contribute to increased team productivity while only 4% reported these work flexibilities

¹⁷ BLS, Current Population Survey, [Hours teleworked as a % of hours worked](#).

¹⁸ OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 10

¹⁹ GAO, [Federal Telework: Interior Can Benefit from Strategic Workforce Planning and Following Key Practices](#), 2024

²⁰ OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 28

²¹ AFGE, [New Survey Shows Rank-and-File Federal Employees Believe Increased Telework Has Improved Productivity](#), 2023

²² OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 11

²³ GAO, [Selected Agencies Need to Evaluate the Potential Effects on Agency Performance](#), 2024, p. 36



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decreasing output.²⁴ In the private sector, 77% of higher-growth companies have attributed higher productivity levels to telework.²⁵

Employee Engagement and Retention

Flexible work policies help to retain employees in both the public and private sector. An OPM survey found that 60% of federal agencies perceive their telework and remote work policies to be central to employee retention. 34% of agencies also attributed increased levels of employee engagement to these flexibilities.²⁶ Moreover, in the private sector, 53% of managers say telework or remote work helps retain talent.²⁷

Recruitment and Hiring

Federal agencies see telework as an effective recruitment tool. According to an OPM survey, 51% of agencies reported that their telework and remote work policies “played a significant role” in candidates applying for and new employees accepting a position.²⁸ Additionally, telework and remote work policies have facilitated employment opportunities for underserved populations, such as veterans and military spouses, individuals with disabilities and people who live in rural communities.²⁹

Instead of Return-to-Workplace, Congress Should Focus on Oversight and Effectiveness

Organizational success in a hybrid environment needs to be measured by productivity and mission accomplishment outcomes, not the physical location of employees. Unnecessarily eliminating flexibilities could backfire, resulting in a loss of valued employees and even greater reliance on more expensive contractors who are not bound by in-person workplace rules. Congress and the executive branch should focus their efforts on better oversight and increased evaluation of flexible work performance effectiveness by doing the following:

- Update the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 to codify the definitions of telework and remote work.
- Enact strong standards and quality control for human capital and payroll data systems so that individual agencies, in addition to OPM and OMB, can perform accurate oversight of flexible work arrangements.

²⁴ OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, pp. 10 and 11

²⁵ HSBC, [Why hybrid working is good for business](#), 2021

²⁶ OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 10

²⁷ Monster.com, [2023 Monster Work Watch Report](#)

²⁸ OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 10

²⁹ In fiscal year 2023, 41,912 veterans and military spouses teleworked and 2,250 worked remotely. The same year, 131,402 individuals with disabilities teleworked and 14,324 worked remotely. OPM, [Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2023](#), December 2024, p. 9



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- Ensure managers and supervisors for remote employees have proper training so that all employees can be set up for success.
- Enhance performance management practices so that an employee's ability to telework is removed if they are not using telework appropriately.
- Like the private sector, create a framework of performance indicators to measure success in a hybrid environment. Additionally, the federal government should use these key performance indicators to hold employees accountable.

Conclusion

Like the private sector, the federal government needs highly qualified employees, well-trained managers and leaders and strong service delivery to achieve its goals. Agency decisions on the work locations of employees must be based first and foremost on ensuring that the government is prepared to tackle the nation's biggest challenges and provide top-notch service to the public. Focusing on whether employees sit in an office or have a more flexible schedule doesn't drive outcomes—the processes and resources needed to accomplish the mission should be the top priority regardless of where employees do their job.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to present these views. We look forward to continuing to work with the Oversight and Government Reform Committee as you look for the best ways for our government to respond to challenges and effectively serve our nation.

Sincerely,

Max Stier
President and CEO
Partnership for Public Service