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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3812

April 8, 2022

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The Honorable Kiran Ahuja
Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
1900 E St. NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Director Ahuja,

I write to voice growing concern with the rising number of unprocessed retirement claims for federal employees. This issue affects retiring federal employees, including veterans with military service. The burdensome and lengthy period of processing retirement claims has been exacerbated by COVID-19 and staffing shortages within OPM.

The OPM backlog of retirement claims hit a recent high of 31,307 in January 2022. The backlog of retirement claims continued to climb in February 2022, reaching a record high of 35,424.^[1] It is reprehensible for employees, many of whom dedicated decades of service to the United States, to be expected to endure months on end without their full annuity, especially as they enter into retirement.

It is my priority to ensure that OPM processes retirement claims in a timely manner. As of February 2022, initial retirement cases produced in less than 60 days on average took 44 days to complete; whereas cases that were produced in more than 60 days on average took 120 days to complete.^[2] If there are issues or questions with a claim, this process can take even longer, leaving employees without their full retirement benefits for months. If OPM is experiencing delays, the retiree should be notified at each step of the process with itemized documentation. Despite previous Congressional interest in addressing the backlog in the federal employee retirement process,^[3] I urge OPM to continue to prioritize reducing the time that federal employees must wait for their full pension.

I request that you answer the following questions in writing:

[1] <https://www.opm.gov/about-us/budget-performance/strategic-plans/retirement-processing-status.pdf>

[2] Ibid

[3] <https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/subcommittee-hearing-addressing-the-backlog-in-the-federal-employee-retirement>; <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/oversight-of-government-management/hearings/federal-retirement-processing-ensuring-proper-and-timely-payments>; <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg81283/html/CHRG-113hhrg81283.htm>

1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the federal employee retirement backlog?
2. What are the main factors that contribute to the delays in OPM processing of federal retirement claims?
3. What is OPM's current plan to resolve this backlog?
4. What is OPM's progress in moving away from paper-based processing?
5. How is OPM working to fix agency errors when processing retirement claims?
6. What staffing levels at OPM would be sufficient to address the retirement benefits backlog?

I respectfully request these responses no later than May 9, 2022.

Sincerely,



Fred Keller
Member of Congress