

Crockett
JC 9-14-23

I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a statement from Parallel Professionals EFM/MOH is a U.S. Department of State Employee Organization for the spouses/partners of Foreign Service professionals who are Civil Servants, Government Contractors, or who work at U.S. Missions abroad.-

House Committee on Oversight and Accountability
Statement for the Record from Foreign Service Spouses

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1. Statement for the record

We encourage the House Oversight Committee to support workplace flexibilities that enable U.S. Department of State Civil Servants to retain their jobs while their Foreign Service spouses serve their country abroad or domestically. Robust policies for telework, including Remote Work Agreements (RWAs) and Domestic Employee Teleworking Abroad (DETO), give the Department the ability to advance a robust foreign policy.

Department employees serve in more than 270 diplomatic missions around the world, as well as in Washington, D.C., and facilities around the United States. When Foreign Service employees transfer to Washington, D.C., their spouses often obtain Civil Service positions at the Department or other federal agencies. When Foreign Service personnel then transfer to a new assignment, which happens every two to three years, RWA and DETO opportunities allow Civil Servants to continue performing their jobs from their spouse's new posting.

Foreign Service family members historically had to give up their own U.S.-based careers when moving abroad. For many spouses who would prefer to work, this sacrifice puts strain on the family finances, compromises their health and happiness and that of the family unit, and threatens the integrity of this model of overseas service. In recent years, with the growing embrace of remote federal jobs such as DETO arrangements, Foreign Service family members have the possibility of continuity and purpose in their careers, and the ability to use their talents and skills alongside their spouses as true parallel professionals, for the benefit of their agencies.

Congress signaled support for fair pay for federal employees teleworking from overseas by passing the bipartisan "Civil Service Federal Employees Serving Overseas Pay Equity Act" as Section 9717 of the FY23 NDAA. However, we have only started to tap into the benefits of these arrangements; according to Department data from Spring 2023, 55% of the 12,676 Foreign Service family members living overseas are unemployed. More needs to be done to normalize and promote these workplace opportunities and to make them accessible to family members living overseas.

Flexible work policies like RWA, DETO, and telework are a valuable resource for federal agencies, and contribute to readiness for the Department. Without these flexibilities, the Federal Government loses a skilled employee. The costs of replacing an employee are both significant and lengthy, as hiring a new employee often requires a new security clearance background check. Keeping and expanding flexible workplace policies enables the Federal Government to meet its commitments to the American people and expands opportunities to Foreign Service family members who want to serve their country.

[Submitted by Foreign Service spouses belonging to the Parallel Professionals (EFM/MOH) Employee Organization at the U.S. Department of State. These views are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. government.]

2. Short foreign service spouse blurbs for members to read

Megan Kuhn and Saúl Hernández (posted to the state of Georgia)

Megan Kuhn was diagnosed with follicular lymphoma in 2019, making her high-risk for COVID-19 complications, and telework enabled her to work full-time as a Civil Servant for the U.S. Department of State throughout the pandemic. When her illness transformed into high-grade B-cell lymphoma, she underwent five cycles of inpatient chemotherapy during her husband's current U.S. Department of State assignment in the state of Georgia. Chemotherapy left her severely immunocompromised but still able to work, and her Remote Work Agreement allowed her to do so without risking exposure to COVID-19 or other illnesses.

Lucia and William Velazquez (Florida residents posted to Montevideo, Uruguay)

With over fifty years of government service between them, Lucia and William Velazquez and their family, have endured five unaccompanied tours and four years of Leave Without Pay to support progression in their careers. Both have had to make sacrifices that resulted in loss of pay, family separations, and career stagnation and regression. In December 2022, William was posted to U.S. Embassy Montevideo, Uruguay, and this time, due to greater flexibility, acceptance of and improvements in telework overseas, Lucia is able to live with her family and they can both continue to support the Federal government's mission and needs.

Alex Lu & Amy Wong (California residents from District 17, Ro Khanna, posted to Accra, Ghana)

Limited career opportunities for Foreign Service family members is among the top stressors and reasons why Foreign Service Officers leave the Foreign Service. Cutting Federal telework opportunities means that highly-qualified family members will struggle to find fulfilling jobs and

meaningful ways to keep their career skills sharp while assigned to represent the U.S. in missions overseas. Expansion of Federal telework flexibilities should be a priority to keep the U.S. Foreign Service a viable career choice for our officers today and to those considering joining the service tomorrow.