

**Government Accountability Office (GAO)**  
**Responses to Questions for the Record from the House Committee**  
**on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**  
**January 26, 2024**

**Responses to Questions from Chairman Gosar**

- 1. A recent GAO report indicated that the Office of Personnel Management does not have sufficient data on teleworking across the federal government and that their data collection process is insufficient.**
  - a. Can you explain the deficiencies that GAO identified, and how the recommendation's issued by GAO will improve OPM's data collection efforts?**
    - OPM maintains data on telework use in its Enterprise Human Resources Integration (EHRI) system, OPM's primary warehouse for data about federal employees. In [October 2016](#), we found that while OPM internal controls provide some assurance of the reliability of EHRI payroll data, weaknesses in the design or implementation of certain control activities and monitoring controls for the EHRI payroll database increase the risk of reliability issues that may limit OPM's ability to fully leverage the data in support of its mission. Specifically, (1) weaknesses in control activities have resulted in limited quality checks and acceptance of unreliable data into the EHRI payroll database; and (2) weaknesses in monitoring activities have resulted in failure to address these reliability issues and increased risk that these issues may compound over time.
    - In response, we made four recommendations to OPM to improve data reliability, including (1) updating EHRI payroll database documentation to be consistent with current field definitions and requirements, including the Guide to Human Resources Reporting and the Guide to Data Standards, Part B; (2) consistently monitoring system-generated error and edit check reports and ensure that timely action is taken to address identified issues; (3) developing a schedule for executing plans to integrate the payroll data into the larger suite of EHRI databases; and (4) evaluating existing internal control activities and develop new control activities for EHRI payroll data, such as implementing transactional edit checks that leverage the information in the other EHRI datasets. Taking these steps will allow OPM to correct internal control weaknesses such as risk of data errors, incomplete data fields, and ineffective monitoring of EHRI payroll data. In turn, OPM will be better able to leverage these data to meet its mission and allow others to make full use of these data for their research needs.
    - In 2019, OPM implemented one recommendation by updating its EHRI database payroll data standards to include data on the number and instances of telework use by federal employees and the number of hours of telework used. In 2023, OPM officials told us they implemented another recommendation by developing a process to monitor system generated error reports in EHRI. However, OPM still needs to close two other recommendations to improve data reliability. Specifically, OPM needs to

finish updating control activities to further leverage EHRI datasets and data quality. It also needs to develop a schedule for integrating payroll data into a larger suite of EHRI databases.

- In addition, we found there are continued inconsistencies and limitations of agency and government-wide telework data outside of the EHRI payroll system. In [February 2017](#), we found that agencies may report to OPM's annual telework data call using a variety of systems that define and track telework measures differently. We recommended that OPM should strengthen controls for reviewing, validating, and reporting telework data in annual *Status of Telework in the Federal Government* reports. Specifically, OPM should follow up with agency officials on data outliers, including significant changes in year-to-year data. OPM disagreed with our recommendation, saying its processes provide agencies with opportunities to correct their own data. We maintain that OPM should implement these actions.

**2. Your testimony stated that “until OPM develops a plan to fully implement all our recommendations to improve data reliability issues...it will continue to be unable to precisely assess telework usage across agencies and provide a full and accurate picture to Congress to support oversight.”**

**a. Can you elaborate on how OPM's failure to implement the GAO's recommendations prevents Congress and the American public from obtaining a more accurate picture of telework and remote work usage across the federal government, including the Department of the Interior?**

- Without available and reliable payroll data, Congress and the American public must continue to rely on data that are more costly, imprecise, or limited in scope—missing opportunities to leverage centralized, standardized data that is essential for accountability and well-informed policy decision-making.

**b. How do the shortcomings from OPM's data collection efforts impact the GAO, OIG, and Congress from conducting more effective oversight?**

- Without reliable telework data from EHRI, GAO, OIG, and Congress must continue to rely on data that are more costly, imprecise, or limited in scope, such as data OPM collects from its annual telework data call. This complicates oversight efforts to ensure agencies comply with the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, are following the Administration's guidance to increase meaningful in-person work, and are following key practices for telework program implementation.

**c. Is there anything Congress should direct OPM to do regarding telework data collection?**

- Congress should consider requiring OPM to develop an implementation plan to improve the reliability of information in EHRI, including telework information. In doing so, Congress should consider providing OPM a deadline for completing the plan.