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February 26, 2024

The Honorable Gordon Hartogensis  
Director  
Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation  
1200 K Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Director Hartogensis:

The Committee on Education and the Workforce (Committee) is continuing its investigation into the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation's (PBGC) failure to safeguard taxpayers' money by overpaying \$127 million to a multiemployer pension plan corresponding to deceased participants.<sup>1</sup> When we wrote to you last month, we were hopeful that PBGC would take responsibility for its grave lapse in judgment and respond in a forthright manner.<sup>2</sup> However, PBGC's February 9, 2024, response both failed to address these concerns and to provide responsive materials.<sup>3</sup> With this letter, we insist that PBGC provide information responsive to the Committee's investigation. Be advised that another failure to provide this information will likely result in the Committee taking compulsory action.

PBGC's February 9 response made no attempt to explain how it justifies making payments beyond the amount authorized under the *American Rescue Plan Act* (ARPA) or why it is failing to take any steps to recoup those overpayments. These concerns are at the core of the Committee's investigation. The Committee acted in good faith by providing PBGC with an additional week to respond under the condition that PBGC provide a comprehensive response.<sup>4</sup> Because PBGC did not provide an adequate response, it appears PBGC fails to recognize that its overpayments need to be rectified and suggests a total disregard for taxpayer dollars.

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<sup>1</sup> PBGC OIG, REPORT NO. EVAL-2024-01, MANAGEMENT ALERT: DECEASED PARTICIPANTS IN THE CENTRAL STATES' SPECIAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE CALCULATION (2023), <https://oig.pbgc.gov/pdfs/EVAL-2024-01.pdf> [hereinafter REPORT].

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Chairwoman Foxx & Chairman Good to Gordon Hartogensis, Dir., PBGC (Jan. 16, 2024), [https://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/1.16.2024\\_-\\_letter\\_to\\_pbgc.pdf](https://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/1.16.2024_-_letter_to_pbgc.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Gail Sevin, Manager, Leg. Aff. Div., PBGC, to Chairwoman Foxx & Chairman Good (Feb. 9, 2024) (on file with Committee).

<sup>4</sup> Email from Joe Wheeler, Comm. staff, to Gail Sevin, Manager, Leg. Aff. Div., PBGC (Jan. 26, 2024) (on file with Committee).

The Committee is serious about its investigation and about seeking legislative change. Chairwoman Foxx has introduced H.R. 7135, the *Ghost Handouts and Overpayments Stop Today Act* (GHOST Act), to ensure PBGC meets its obligation to reclaim any overpayment it made in the Special Financial Assistance (SFA) program.<sup>5</sup> However, further information from PBGC may be critical to revise the GHOST Act or to draft similar legislation. Therefore, it is imperative that you respond to each individual request made below, providing the specific information or responses requested by no later than March 4, 2024.

1. Explain what legal justification PBGC has for paying out taxpayer funds in excess of the amount authorized by ARPA.<sup>6</sup>
2. Provide the steps PBGC has taken or plans to take to quantify similar overpayments already paid to other multiemployer pension plans.
3. Did PBGC ask plans that received SFA overpayments if they would return the funds? Why or why not?
4. PBGC has stated that it plans to make changes to the SFA application process:
  - a. Does PBGC intend to suspend the approval of SFA applications until it can implement changes to SFA application instructions that would allow PBGC to conduct an independent death search to ensure that it does not attribute funds to plans based on deceased participants? If not, why not?
  - b. Will PBGC compare census data for all pending applications with the Social Security Administration Death Master File before paying further SFA? If not, why not?
5. PBGC's response letter to the OIG cites "PBGC Legal Analysis dated June 30, 2023" when PBGC suggests that the funds described in the OIG report were properly paid and should not be subject to recovery actions.<sup>7</sup>
  - a. Provide the "PBGC Legal Analysis dated June 30, 2023" and any supporting documentation that led PBGC to reach the conclusion that the funds described in the OIG report were properly paid and should not be subject to recovery actions.
  - b. The OIG's closure memo indicates that the OIG needed to consult the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for additional information.<sup>8</sup> Did OMB provide PBGC with technical assistance regarding payment integrity or compliance with OMB Circular A-123, Appendix C, in the development of its SFA rules? If so,

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<sup>5</sup> H.R. 7135, 118th Cong. (2024).

<sup>6</sup> See 29 U.S.C. § 1432(j)(1) (providing for SFA funds in "such amount required for the plan to pay all benefits due.")

<sup>7</sup> REPORT, *supra* note 1, at 12.

<sup>8</sup> Mem. from John Seger, Assistant Inspector Gen. for Audit, PBGC OIG, to Lisa Carter, Dir., Corp. Controls & Revs. Dep't, PBGC (Sept. 27, 2023), <https://www.pbgc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rcf-closure-memo-2023-05-02-2.pdf>.

provide all technical assistance documents and communications regarding SFA payment integrity or compliance with OMB Circular A-123, Appendix C, including but not limited to technical assistance documents and communications between PBGC, PBGC's Board of Directors (or their representatives), and OMB.

6. In light of Sean O'Brien's comments highlighted in our January 16, 2024, letter, do you agree that funds provided to the Central States Pension Fund should be refunded to PBGC if the Central States Pension Fund was not entitled to them? Why or why not?

House Rule X vests the Committee with the jurisdiction and responsibility to "review and study on a continuing basis the application, administration, execution, and effectiveness of laws and programs addressing subjects within its jurisdiction." This includes the Committee's obligation to investigate PBGC's implementation of the SFA and to make legislative changes, as warranted. The requests in this letter and any documents created as the result of these requests will be deemed congressional documents and property of the Committee. An attachment to this letter provides additional information about responding to the Committee's request. As PBGC's February 9 response suggests that PBGC personnel either did not read these instructions or they specifically chose not to follow them, we encourage you to read them and direct your staff to follow them closely as PBGC responds to this letter.

Thank you for your prompt attention to the Committee's requests.

Sincerely,



Virginia Foxx  
Chairwoman



Bob Good  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Health, Employment,  
Labor, and Pensions

Enclosure

## **Responding to Committee Document Requests**

1. The agency's response to questions and request(s) should be answered or provided in separate document and not included inside a narrative response.
2. In complying with this request, you should produce all responsive documents that are in your agency's possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or other past or present employees of the executive branch, or a representative acting on your behalf. Your response should also produce documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that the agency has a right to copy or to which you have access, or that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party.
3. Records, documents, data or information that have been requested and/or are related to underlying requests should not be destroyed, modified, removed, transferred or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee on Education and the Workforce (the "Committee").
4. If any entity, organization or individual denoted in this request has been, or is also known by any other name than that herein denoted, the request shall be read also to include that alternative identification.
5. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., email, CD, memory stick, or thumb drive) in lieu of paper productions. To the extent responses are provided in paper form, any documents that are stapled, clipped, or otherwise fastened together should not be separated. Documents produced in response to a request should be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers, or identifying markers with which they were associated when this request was issued.
6. Regardless of format, documents produced pursuant to this request should be produced in the order in which they appear in your files and should not be rearranged. Indicate the office or division and person from whose files each document was produced.
7. Regardless of format, documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production and a total page count for the entire production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box or folder is produced, each CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box, or folder should contain an index describing its contents. Documents produced in electronic format should also be identified and indexed electronically.
8. Electronic document productions should be prepared according to the following standards:
  - (a) The production should consist of single page Tagged Image File ("TIF"), files accompanied by a Concordance-format load file, an Opticon reference file, and a file defining the fields and character lengths of the load file.
  - (b) Document numbers in the load file should match document Bates numbers and TIF file names.

(c) If the production is completed through a series of multiple partial productions, field names and file order in all load files should match.

9. All documents shall be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
10. When you produce documents, you should individually identify the paragraph, question number or request number in the Committee's request to which the documents respond.
11. It shall not be a basis for refusal to produce documents that any other person or entity—either inside or outside of the executive branch—also possesses non-identical or identical copies of the same documents.
12. If any of the requested information is only reasonably available in machine-readable form (such as on a computer server, hard drive, or computer backup tape), the agency's staff should consult with the Committee staff to determine the appropriate format in which to produce the information.
13. If compliance with any request cannot be made in full, compliance shall be made to the extent possible and shall include a written explanation of why full compliance is not possible.
14. If the agency does not expect to produce all documents responsive to a request by the date requested, the agency's staff shall consult with the Committee as soon as it is known the agency cannot meet the deadline, but no later than 24 hours before the due date to explain:
  - (a) what will be provided by the due date;
  - (b) why the agency believes certain materials cannot be produced by the due date; and
  - (c) the agency's proposed timeline for providing any omitted information.
15. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, or has been placed into the possession, custody, or control of any third party and cannot be provided in response to this request, you should:
  - (a) identify the document, including its date, author, subject, and recipients;
  - (b) explain the circumstances under which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control, or was placed in the possession, custody, or control of a third party;
  - (c) state how the document was disposed of;
  - (d) identify the name, current address, and telephone number of the person who currently has possession, custody or control over the document;
  - (e) state the date of disposition; and

- (f) identify the name, current address, and telephone number of each person who authorized said disposition or who had or has knowledge of said disposition.
16. If any document responsive to this request cannot be located, identify the document and describe with particularity the efforts made to locate the document and the specific reason for its disappearance, destruction or unavailability.
17. In the event that a document or portion of a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document or redaction:
- (a) Bates number(s);
  - (b) the privilege asserted and the grounds therefor;
  - (c) the type of document;
  - (d) the general subject matter;
  - (e) any other description necessary to identify the document;
  - (f) the date, author, and addressee; and
  - (g) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other.

If a claimed privilege applies to only a portion of any document, that portion only should be withheld and the remainder of the document should be produced.

18. Any objections or claims of privilege are waived if you fail to provide an explanation of why full compliance is not possible and a log identifying with specificity the ground(s) for withholding each withheld document prior to the request compliance date.
19. In complying with the request, be apprised that (unless otherwise determined by the Committee) the Committee does not recognize: any purported non-disclosure privileges associated with the common law including, but not limited to, the deliberative-process privilege, the attorney-client privilege, and attorney work product protections; any purported privileges or protections from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act; or any purported contractual privileges, such as non-disclosure agreements.
20. Any assertion by a request recipient of any such non-constitutional legal bases for withholding documents or other materials, for refusing to answer any deposition question, or for refusing to provide hearing testimony, shall be of no legal force and effect and shall not provide a justification for such withholding or refusal, unless and only to the extent that the Committee (or the chair of the Committee, if authorized) has consented to recognize the assertion as valid.

21. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document, communication, meeting, or other event is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or other agency employees, or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, you should produce all documents that would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.
22. The time period covered by this request is included in the attached request. To the extent a time period is not specified, produce relevant documents from January 20, 2021 to the present.
23. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data or information, not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date, shall be produced immediately upon subsequent location or discovery. Such submission shall include an explanation as to why the information was not produced originally.
24. If physical documents are to be delivered, two sets of documents should be delivered, one set to the Majority Staff in Room 2176 of the Rayburn House Office Building and one set to the Minority Staff in Room 2101 of the Rayburn House Office Building during Committee office hours (9am-5pm, unless other arrangements are made) and signed by members of the respective staffs upon delivery.
25. Upon completion of the document production, the agency's written response should include a written certification, signed by the Secretary or his or her designee, stating that:
  - (a) a diligent search has been completed of all documents in your possession, custody, or control that reasonably could contain responsive documents; and
  - (b) all documents located during the search that are responsive have been produced to the Committee.

### **Definitions**

1. The term "document" means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, working papers, records, notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, inter-office and intra-office communications, electronic mail (e-mail), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone call, meeting or other communication, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or

representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), and electronic, mechanical, and electric records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.

2. The term “documents in your possession, custody or control” means documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, or representatives acting on your behalf; documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access; and/or documents that have been placed in the possession, custody, or control of any third party.
3. The term “communication” means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, email, regular mail, telexes, releases, or otherwise.
4. The terms “and” and “or” shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information which might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neuter genders.
5. The terms “person” or “persons” mean natural persons, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, subsidiaries, divisions, departments, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities, and all subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, or other units thereof.
6. The term “identify,” when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual's complete name and title; and (b) the individual's business address and phone number.
7. The term “referring or relating,” with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflect s, identifies, states, refers to, deals with or is pertinent to that subject in any manner whatsoever.
8. The term “agency” means any department, independent establishment, or corporation of the federal government. For the purposes of responding to oversight requests, the Committee expects information to be provided from all sub-agencies of an agency and not just the information that is immediately available to the addressee or the addressee’s immediate sub-agency.
9. The term “privilege” includes, but is not limited to, any claim that a document either may or must be withheld from production pursuant to any statute, rule, or regulation.



10. The term “employee” means agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, de facto employee, joint adventurer, loaned employee, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, contract employee, contractor, or any other type of service provider.
11. The term “Administration” means and refers to any department, agency, division, office, subdivision, entity, official, administrator, employee, attorney, agent, advisor, consultant, staff, or any other person acting on behalf or under the control or direction of the Executive Branch.
12. “You” or “your” means and refers to you as a natural person and the United States and any of its agencies, offices, subdivisions, entities, officials, administrators, employees, attorneys, agents, advisors, consultants, staff, contractors, or any other persons acting on your behalf or under your control or direction; and includes any other person(s) defined in the document request letter.