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EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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March 6, 2024

The Honorable Julie A. Su
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Acting Secretary Su:

The Committee on Education and the Workforce (Committee) is continuing its investigation into the Department of Labor's (DOL) plans for returning to regular, in-person work.¹ The Committee is undertaking this investigation on behalf of taxpayers who are paying for a federal government that ceased regular operations nearly four years ago. Even the White House understands this is a problem. On January 19, 2024, the White House Chief of Staff, Jeff Zients, wrote an email to agency and department heads asking for their progress on return-to-office policies. In this email, he asked agencies to submit their return-to-office action plans to the White House's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) by January 26.² Despite repeated pleas from the White House, it appears as though DOL has failed to make any meaningful efforts to respect taxpayer dollars and return to in person work.

On September 18, 2022, President Biden declared that "the pandemic is over."³ However, many agencies across the federal government have retained remote work policies instituted during the pandemic. When the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently analyzed the utilization of space at federal headquarters buildings, DOL and five other agencies were estimated to be using only 23 percent of their headquarters space on average.⁴ Furthermore, information from a recent *Freedom of Information Act* request shows a current space allocation of 1600 square feet per person at DOL's headquarters, even though the current federal benchmark is 190 usable

¹ Letter from Chairwoman Foxx to Martin J. Walsh, Sec'y of Lab. (Jan. 12, 2023), https://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/01.12.23_follow_up_letter_dol.pdf.

² Hans Nichols, *Scoop: W.H. Demands Proof from Cabinet officials on Return-to-Office*, AXIOS (Jan. 19, 2024), <https://www.axios.com/2024/01/19/zients-biden-cabinet-return-to-office>.

³ Kate Sullivan, Jamie Gumbrecht, Allie Malloy, & Kevin Liptak, *Biden: 'The Pandemic is Over'*, CNN (Sept. 18, 2022), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/18/politics/biden-pandemic-60-minutes/index.html>.

⁴ U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-24-107006, FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY: AGENCIES NEED NEW BENCHMARKS TO MEASURE AND SHED UNDERUTILIZED SPACE (2023) [hereinafter GAO UNDERUTILIZED SPACE], <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24107006.pdf>.

square feet per person.⁵ According to GAO, one of the primary reasons for the low utilization of space at federal agencies was that the agencies' in-office workforce has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.⁶ The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey for 2022 shows that a significant number of DOL's employees are teleworking. The survey found that 73 percent of DOL's respondents who live within commuting distance have a telework agreement.⁷ Moreover, 31 percent said they telework every day, and 40 percent said they telework three or four times a week.⁸ This is unacceptable. Pandemic-style remote work policies do not reflect post-pandemic realities.

In April 2023, OMB directed agencies "to substantially increase" in-person work at headquarters offices.⁹ In an email to the Cabinet on August 4, 2023, Mr. Zients wrote that returning to the office was "critical to the well-being of our teams and will enable us to deliver better results for the American people."¹⁰ However, as the above numbers clearly demonstrate, the White House's repeated calls for a return to work have gone unheeded at the expense of the public. While return to in-person work was emphasized to the Cabinet as "a priority of the President,"¹¹ the lack of any true progress in this area demonstrates that the White House cannot exercise the most basic management functions over its own agencies. Furthermore, it is evidence that Cabinet officials such as yourself are failing to garner any level of accountability from their employees.

As the Committee with jurisdiction over the management of DOL,¹² it is imperative that the Committee be provided with a copy of the return-to-office action plan submitted to the White House. GAO's finding that DOL is using a low percentage of its headquarters space is extremely concerning and indicative of mismanagement. An accurate understanding of the headquarters staffing situation is necessary for the Committee to ensure that DOL is undertaking its mandates faithfully and in accordance with the law. Furthermore, employees failing to return to the office could expose taxpayers to significant waste, fraud, and abuse.

The Committee requests that you provide a copy of the return-to-office action plan that DOL provided to the White House by no later than March 20, 2024. If DOL did not provide a plan, please provide an explanation as to why. In addition, provide the following information:

⁵ Colin Aamot, *Labor Department Employees Not Returning to In-Person Work Raises Red Flags*, DAILY SIGNAL (Nov. 17, 2023), <https://www.dailysignal.com/2023/11/17/labor-department-employees-returning-person-work-raises-red-flags/>.

⁶ GAO UNDERUTILIZED SPACE, *supra* note 4, at 10.

⁷ 2022 OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT FEDERAL EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT SURVEY: REPORT BY AGENCY, <https://www.opm.gov/fevs/reports/data-reports/data-reports/report-by-agency/2022/2022-agency-report.pdf> at 231.

⁸ *Id.* at 229.

⁹ David Shepardson, *White House Asks Agencies to Step Up Workers' Return to Offices*, REUTERS (Apr. 13, 2023), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/white-house-tells-agencies-reconsider-in-person-government-work-plans-2023-04-13/>.

¹⁰ Alex Thompson, *Scoop: Biden Pushes to End Remote Work Era for Feds*, AXIOS (Aug. 4, 2023), <https://www.axios.com/2023/08/04/biden-end-remote-work-federal-employees>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² House Rule X, cl. 1(e).

The Honorable Julie A. Su

March 6, 2024

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1. The daily entry and exit data (raw numbers only) for the Francis L. Perkins Building and the Postal Square Building from January 21, 2021, through January 31, 2024;
2. The daily entry and exit data (raw numbers only) for the Francis L. Perkins Building and the Postal Square Building for calendar year 2019;
3. Materials sufficient to show the current utilization of space within the Francis L. Perkins Building;
4. The number of employees who currently report to the Francis L. Perkins Building and the Postal Square Building as an in-person duty location;
5. The White House has directed agencies to have a system for monitoring the progress of returning to the office “fully in place.”¹³ If DOL has implemented this system, provide all records maintained for monitoring the progress of DOL’s return-to-office. If DOL does not have this system, provide an explanation about why DOL has failed to monitor its progress;
6. An explanation of whether DOL has ensured all employees are being paid in accordance with the locality in which they reside and from which they work instead of where their duty station is; and
7. All documents and communications exchanged between DOL and the American Federation of Government Employees union related to the development and implementation of the return-to-office action plan that DOL provided to the White House.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman

Enclosure

¹³ Hans Nichols, *supra* note 2.

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.