

June 25, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chapter Presidents and Legislative Coordinators

RE: House Hearing on Keeping Federal Employees Safe During the Pandemic

SUMMARY: The House Government Operations Subcommittee held a hearing to examine federal guidelines for reopening government workplaces.

Today the House Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on Government Operations held a hearing to examine how the government can protect federal employees while continuing operations and providing vital resources to the public. NTEU submitted the attached statement for the record, noting how many federal workers continued to report to their worksites or telework to continue providing essential government services and calling for agencies to improve cleanliness, provide necessary personal protective equipment, and continue with telework and flexible work arrangements in order to ensure the health and safety of employees.

During today's hearing, Subcommittee Chairman Gerald Connolly (D-VA) highlighted detailed plans issued by several private sector companies about how they were planning to safely return their employees to their worksites and questioned why federal agencies have not done the same. He also stressed the need for employees and contractors to have confidence in agency return plans. In addition, Chairman Connolly announced that he introduced two bills today, one to require agencies to post online their plans to bring employees safely back to their worksites, and the other to provide additional flexibility and support for federal employees during the pandemic, including ensuring hazard pay for frontline federal workers, authorizing weather and safety leave for employees who need to care for a child or other family member due to COVID-19, and childcare reimbursement for federal employees working on the frontlines of the pandemic.

Former U.S. Senator Jim DeMint, Chairman of the Conservative Partnership Institute, testified that federal employees need to get back to work — safely, prudently, creatively, but as soon as possible. He said that workers and their families need a return to normalcy and that the federal government should set an example. Representative Jody Hice (R-GA) inquired about employees getting paid to work 100 percent official time during the pandemic and Representatives Glenn Grothman (R-WI) and Thomas Massie (R-KY) expressed frustration with the inability of their constituents to get their paper-filed tax returns due to IRS Center closures.

As more agencies begin to ask employees to return to their worksites, NTEU will continue to push for return plans that include testing and contact tracing, provide employees with flexibility, and ensure rigorous cleaning and protective equipment. We will keep you posted as Congress continues its oversight efforts in this area.

Anthony M. Reardon
National President

Attachment