

HHS UPDATE

NTEU National Treasury Employees Union

HHS Mum on Reopening Information, Decisions

Employee safety remains NTEU's priority as coronavirus cases rise and employees are gradually recalled to work.

As various OpDivs enter phase 2 of reopening, HHS has released only a general set of "gating criteria" for reopening offices and has largely left decisions to each OpDiv or individual managers within them.

The last time HHS briefed NTEU on these general gating criteria was in early June and, since then, has not updated the union on any reopening decisions. NTEU is pushing for continuing maximum telework and flexibilities, as well as for weather and safety leave for high-risk employees without portable work.

House Takes Up 2021 HHS, FDA Funding

The House approved an appropriations bill that would provide \$3.212 billion for the Food and Drug Administration, a \$40 million boost over this fiscal year's funding levels. The next step for this bill is Senate mark-ups, which could happen as soon as September but is more likely to begin after the election.

This week, the House will take up legislation to fund the remainder of HHS. The House committee bill fully funds HHS programs and NTEU is urging its adoption without any anti-federal employee amendments. Rep. Rick Allen (R-Ga.) has filed an amendment for a 5 percent cut in HHS funding. NTEU is strongly opposing this amendment and will continue to press for adequate funding for HHS and FDA.

NTEU Looking at Change to Transit Subsidies Program

NTEU is closely examining a new requirement by HHS that employees currently on full-time telework due to COVID-19 withdraw from the transit benefits program. HHS failed to respond to NTEU's questions about how the agency will re-enroll employees called back to offices without a delay in processing and whether full-time teleworkers who must occasionally visit their offices will be authorized to use the benefit. As NTEU considers its next action on this issue, the union encourages employees to save their receipts for money spent on public transit for work purposes.

Bargaining to Begin Over Paralegal Changes

NTEU has demanded to bargain over an HHS plan to eliminate the Paralegal position (GS-0950-9/11) and create a Legal Administrative Specialist position (GS-0901-11) in the Office of Medicare Hearings and Appeals. Under the agency's plan, the approximately 40 paralegals would be transitioned to the new LAS Position at a GS-11 level effective Oct. 11, and would receive training. Qualified employees who don't want to transition to the new LAS position may be offered Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) or a Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment (VSIP).

NTEU has had a briefing from HHS on its plan and has submitted proposals. The union will provide more information as bargaining continues.