



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL ENGINEERS AFL-CIO & CLC

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March 16, 2020

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Hon. Dale Cabaniss, Director
Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Hon. Russell Vought, Acting Director
Office of Management & Budget (OMB)
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Directors Cabaniss and Vought,

As the executive officers of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), representing upwards of 90,000 workers, including tens of thousands of federal workers across the country, we would like to thank you for the memoranda issued by OPM on March 7, 2020 and by OMB on March 12, 2020 on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The federal workforce and the nation are facing an unprecedented threat and a rapid, nimble, pro-active approach is vital to protect workers and the nation they serve. The gravity of the situation demands that appropriate steps be aggressively taken as soon as possible, not only to protect the health and livelihoods of the workers we represent and their families, but also to protect their communities from any preventable added burden to local health care systems, and even more importantly to make sure federal workers can continue to provide critical services for the nation and the American people during the extended crisis.

That said, the voluntary implementation of OMB and OPM guidance by Agencies has been spotty, quite good in some places, but sadly subject to the whims of recalcitrant or incompetent management at others. We therefore ask that you DIRECT all federal agencies to adopt the following policies immediately, to work with Local Unions to foster smooth and efficient implementation while maintaining, to the maximum extent possible, the high quality and efficiency of federal services, and to hold Agency heads accountable for the swift and effective implementation of this direction.

- 1. All employees at all Federal Agencies who can perform a significant portion of their duties remotely should immediately be directed to telework to the maximum extent possible.** Supervisors should be directed to implement this immediately and to develop a maximally flexible plan with their employees on how best to continue to perform their duties under these circumstances, including dealing with dependent children at home due to school closures. For those in this group who have certain duties that require on-site work, such duties should be postponed to the maximum degree possible while remote duties are carried out. IFPTE recognizes that telework is not a pretext for lower productivity and we are prepared to assist in any way possible to foster resilient mission continuity across the federal sector during this crisis, but we must emphasize that the safety and wellbeing of workers and of the public are paramount.
- 2. All employees at all federal Agencies who must perform mission critical duties that cannot be postponed or performed remotely, including those who interact with the public, especially first responders, should be granted all available flexibilities and accommodations, including being provided with all necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), to minimize any possible risk to themselves and the public.** Agency heads must consider postponement as a first option and certify that the duties are: a) mission critical, b) cannot possibly be performed remotely or virtually, and c) that postponement would cause irreparable harm to the mission, the public, or the nation before implementing this option. Agencies must use existing funding flexibilities or, if necessary, request any additional flexibility needed to address this critical priority, working with their Appropriators and

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Authorizers to make this possible. IFPTE stands prepared to assist in any way to support Agencies as they address this critical challenge, including any need to persuade legislators to provide discretionary permission or statutory relief to keep our mission critical workers safe.

3. **Those few employees at all federal Agencies who cannot perform any of their non-mission critical duties remotely should be given administrative “Weather and Safety” leave.** Federal employees who may not be able telework but whose duties are not deemed mission critical by management should be accorded some appropriate version of administrative leave. Through no fault of their own, their duties cannot be performed without endangering themselves or their communities so, for the benefit of the nation, they should be sent home with full pay until the crisis is over.
4. **Those few employees at all federal Agencies whose mission critical duties cannot be performed remotely and who are in a high-risk health category (e.g., are older adults and/or have an underlying condition) should, to the maximum extent possible, be given administrative “Weather and Safety” leave.** Except under extraordinary circumstances whereby urgent mission critical work cannot be postponed, or performed remotely or by someone else (as certified by the Agency head), high-risk employees (as defined by the CDC) should be accorded administrative leave (consistent with the March 12, 2020 OMB memo). All agencies should be directed to inform employees of this option and to solicit self-identification of high-risk status so they can be treated appropriately either under 1, 3, or 4. Through no fault of their own, their duties cannot be performed without unduly endangering themselves and local health care systems, so they should be sent home with full pay until the crisis is over.
5. **All employees at all federal Agencies should be allowed to use every available lawful leave authority to minimize unprecedented family stresses during this crisis.** Above and beyond the telework flexibilities described above, employees should be approved for four weeks of personal sick leave (SL) and three months of paid family medical leave (FFSF), as is called for in HR 6201, the “Families First Coronavirus Response Act”. This leave should be advanced, if need be, without any burdensome paperwork (consistent with the March 12 OMB memo) to be used to care for themselves or family members should they become sick, or must be quarantined, or to accommodate school closures or other disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

America is on the verge of a large surge in COVID-19 cases as community spread moves its way across the country. We must all do our absolute best, as institutions and individuals, to minimize the rate of spread in order to prevent saturation of local health systems and to avoid the catastrophic consequences that would then ensue. The safety and wellbeing of the federal workforce is at grave risk, along with that of the public they serve, during this unprecedented pandemic in part because common-sense implementation of your guidelines are not being uniformly undertaken across the federal government.

We therefore ask that you direct all Agencies to follow the above guidelines, consistent with your previous memoranda and any local bargaining agreements. We also ask that you state that every deviation or exception from the above must be justified in writing based on critical public need or safety, approved by the Agency head (or an official deputy), and made available to the affected employee. IFPTE stands ready to assist in any way we can during this national emergency.

Sincerely,



Paul Shearon
President

Matthew Biggs
Secretary-Treasurer/Legislative Director