

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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May 20, 2021

Ms. Kathleen McGettigan  
Acting Director  
Office of Personnel Management  
1900 E Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20415-1000

Dear Acting Director McGettigan:

I write to urge you to continue to place the safety of our dedicated federal and contractor personnel at the forefront of any discussions in which the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) engages regarding how and when to bring employees back to their physical worksites.

I understand some may be pushing to return federal employees to physical offices as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup> While I am hopeful that we are getting closer to that reality, thanks in great part to the unprecedented efforts of the Biden Administration to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine, the health and safety of federal employees remains of paramount concern. We must ensure that Administration officials are cautious and prudent when requiring federal employees and contractors to return to federal office buildings, while continuing our responsibility to meet agency missions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting that rates of infection, hospitalization, and deaths due to COVID-19 are on the decline.<sup>2</sup> In addition, approximately 60% of American adults have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, however, the CDC also reports that the daily number of vaccine doses administered has fallen since the beginning of April and continues to fluctuate.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Ranking Member Jody Hice, Subcommittee on Government Operations, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, to Kathleen McGettigan, Acting Director, Office of Personnel Management (May 18, 2021) (online at <https://republicans-oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Hice-Letter-to-OPM-Return-to-Workplace.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review* (May 14, 2021) (online at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html)).

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID Data Tracker* (accessed May 19, 2021) (online at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases>).

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Trends in Number of COVID-19 Vaccinations in the US* (accessed May 19, 2021) (online at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccination-trends>).

I believe that federal employees who need to be in offices should be allowed to return as soon as is practicable. Yet we must balance the needs of continuing government operations and providing vital resources to the public with the equally important obligation to protect the health and safety of federal employees so that they can continue to provide those services.

I have witnessed how imperative it is to have transparent and well-defined safety plans that are clearly communicated to employees. Uncertainty on best practices and agency policies—and a general lack of communication with federal staff—led to tragedy last year for one my constituents. Chai Suthammanont continued working during the pandemic and ultimately succumbed to COVID-19 after likely being exposed at work to a fellow employee who tested positive for the virus. Although not all stories ended in tragedy, thousands of other federal employees also contracted the virus while they continued to execute their agencies' missions bravely throughout the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> To protect the federal workforce as the pandemic continues, any talk of returning employees to their offices should only be done in conjunction with discussions of how to do so safely.

On February 11, 2021, I reintroduced the Chai Suthammanont Remembrance Act of 2021 with several colleagues to promote the development and oversight of comprehensive and well-defined re-opening plans that would help to return our dedicated federal employees back to the workplace safely. On May 13, 2021, this critical legislation was reported favorably by the Committee on Oversight and Reform.

This legislation would require every federal agency to prepare and communicate a safety plan for returning workers to physical worksites. The plan would include descriptions of the personal protective equipment that the agency will provide to its on-site employees and contractors; guidance of other mitigation efforts; protections for employees whose work requires them to travel off-site; testing, contact-tracing, and vaccination protocols; and protocols that ensure the continuity of operations in the event that it is necessary to reverse on-site requirements. The bill would also require each agency's Office of the Inspector General to report on whether the agency has published and implemented its safety plan.

Until this bill passes Congress and is signed into law by President Biden, I urge OPM to ensure that agencies put appropriate safety plans in place as they return their employees to federal facilities.

In conjunction with the Biden Administration's efforts to advocate for safe workspaces for federal employees, we all have an opportunity to ensure that federal employees can return to their offices while still feeling safe to perform their jobs in service to the nation. I look forward to working with you and this Administration to protect the health and safety of our unparalleled workforce and to serving the American people in this effort.

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<sup>5</sup> *Nearly 3,500 Federal Workers to Get Benefits for Contracting the Coronavirus at Work*, Washington Post (Nov. 20, 2020) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/politics/federal-employees-coronavirus-work-benefits/2020/11/19/4ae10b80-2a9f-11eb-9b14-ad872157ebc9\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/federal-employees-coronavirus-work-benefits/2020/11/19/4ae10b80-2a9f-11eb-9b14-ad872157ebc9_story.html)).

Ms. Kathleen McGettigan  
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Sincerely,



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Gerald E. Connolly  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Government Operations

cc: The Honorable Jody Hice, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Government Operations