



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
PREPARED TESTIMONY FOR
THE CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICER
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THURSDAY APRIL 16, 2015

Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Subcommittee; thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to address our efforts at the Department of Homeland Security to enhance employee engagement.

I am Catherine Emerson, the Department's first career Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO). I am responsible for the Department's human capital policy, which covers recruiting, diversity and inclusion, learning and development, and workforce planning in support of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) mission. My office supports employee engagement efforts led by Secretary Johnson and Deputy Secretary Mayorkas.

Our employees at DHS stand on the front lines, day in and day out, to protect our citizens from threats at home and abroad. For example, on a typical day DHS employees screen over 1.8 million passengers at our nation's airports; over 19,000 pounds of illegal drugs are seized in or near our ports of entry; over 3.4 million miles of waterways and our borders are patrolled; and 54 search and rescue cases are conducted. Each and every day, our employees must bring and deliver their "A-game" to work to protect the homeland. As noted by Secretary Johnson, "homeland security remains the most important and urgent function a government can provide to its people. There is no room for complacency."

Our employees do difficult work under challenging circumstances, from protecting the border at the Rio Grande Valley, to guiding maritime traffic on the Mississippi River, to managing shipments at the Port of Seattle and welcoming visitors to JFK International Airport. Therefore, as Deputy Secretary Mayorkas has stated, "we must create the Department our employees deserve."

To create the Department that our employees deserve, we must start with our leadership to improve employee morale. We have taken concrete steps to provide our senior leaders with the direction and tools to focus on strengthening employee engagement within their workforce. We are also in the process of implementing efforts to address issues identified by our employees. These issues include: enhancing communication, sharing information about opportunities for professional advancement, addressing pay issues, and creating employee development and training opportunities.

For today, and for the future of our workforce, our focus is on action. The causes of morale issues at DHS have been studied and analyzed. Now, it is time to implement what we have learned from this information to guide our efforts. We are leaning forward to implement actions that we believe will make a lasting, valuable difference to our employees.

We at DHS are not happy with our overall scores in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and we are working diligently to improve. We are proud that DHS components, such as the United States Coast Guard, have achieved high scores in job satisfaction and employee engagement. The variety of missions our employees have to protect our homeland means that we must have a corporate focus for engagement that is driven by the operations of our employees. Employee engagement is not a human resources program. Employee engagement is a leadership responsibility for the entire Department.

While DHS components are developing and executing employee engagement action plans that are specific to their particular needs, the Department is simultaneously focusing on enterprise-level activities. In 2014, the Secretary launched the employee-focused “Building the Department You Deserve” initiative. This initiative is led by Deputy Secretary Mayorkas and is coordinated through an operationally focused Employee Engagement Steering Committee, composed of component representatives, which guides cross-departmental engagement initiatives.

Since last year, the initiative has focused on the following:

- We have added transparency to the hiring process. Employees have communicated through the Federal Employment Viewpoint Survey that they want a better understanding of how to apply for positions and the procedures that are followed throughout the hiring process. We have posted hiring information on our internal employee website, provided helpful tips for managers that highlight how to lead a transparent hiring process, and more prominently posted job opportunities.
- The Secretary honored several hundred employees at the first Departmental awards ceremony that DHS has held in six years. He has directed components to host appropriate ceremonies and events to honor the contributions of their employees and DHS partners. We are providing transparency to enable our employees to understand the performance awards process within components, and encourage acknowledgement and recognition of their fine work.
- We have redesigned our internal “DHS Connect” intranet site to highlight the extraordinary efforts of our employees and their impact in achieving the Department’s mission on a rotating basis. This outcome enables greater visibility and appreciation of our employee accomplishments.
- We worked closely with Congress for the passage of the Border Patrol Agent Pay Reform Act in 2014. This legislation replaces the Administratively Uncontrollable Overtime (AUO) with a new and sound process for ensuring that our Border Patrol personnel are properly paid for their work. This has been, and will continue to be, a top priority for the Department. The legislation had the support of the National Border Patrol Council, which represents over 17,000 agents.

- The Deputy Secretary announced to ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations law enforcement personnel a career path that provides them with growth opportunities and a pay scale commensurate with their tremendous responsibilities and skills.

The preceding measures indicate our commitment to employee engagement as a top Departmental priority. Under the leadership of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, we will continue to move forward with additional initiatives in the coming months.

Overall, DHS is building a common leadership experience that begins at our onboarding and continues throughout front-line and mid-level leaders' careers. While we plan to announce our efforts shortly, we are leveraging the leader development resources within the Department to create a unified program that will bring together high-potential leaders from across our components. We will continue to emphasize our key executive programs including the DHS Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program and the Department's own Executive Capstone Program for new members of the Senior Executive Service.

For all employees including our non-SES workforce, we are creating opportunities for employees to shadow DHS leaders. This program will be piloted soon and will primarily have a local focus, exposing our employees more directly to the career prospects and leadership responsibilities of their co-workers, leaders, and local colleagues. For example, a Transportation Security Officer may have the opportunity to shadow a Border Patrol Agent or Coast Guard Officer to learn more about other roles and career opportunities.

We will also be implementing programs to create opportunities for employees to identify and implement innovative efforts that will contribute to the efficiency of their offices.

The Secretary and Deputy Secretary will continue to hold regular town hall meetings with employees, hearing their concerns and suggestions while visiting field offices, during video conferences, and through gatherings at headquarters. The Deputy Secretary will also continue to discussions with union partners, hearing their feedback and talking with them about the Department's efforts to improve employee engagement.

Building the Department our employees deserve is about finding better ways to do business, listening to our employees, and building opportunities for them to succeed. Secretary Johnson has been a vocal advocate for our employees and has framed his Unity of Effort initiative in part on creating clear expectations for collaboration across the Department. In the words of Secretary Johnson, "we must inject a new energy into DHS," and we are working diligently to do just that.

Every day, DHS employees carry out difficult and often dangerous work that in many cases goes unseen by the American public. Through our efforts, we hope to enhance the work experience and honor the contributions of our hard-working and dedicated workforce.

Thank you again for supporting our employees who are protecting all of us, each and every day.



Catherine V. Emerson Chief Human Capital Officer



Catherine V. Emerson was appointed as the Department of Homeland Security's Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) in August 2011, the first career member of the Senior Executive Service to serve in this role. Ms. Emerson is responsible for the Department's human capital program, which includes recruiting, diversity and inclusion, learning and development, workforce planning, policies, and technology in support of the DHS mission.

During her tenure as CHCO, DHS has markedly improved veterans employment, reduced time to hire, deployed a comprehensive leader development framework, contributed to an initiative to create a highly capable cyber security workforce, and established the first DHS headquarters' anti-harassment unit, and led the development of a more comprehensive and inclusive strategic human capital strategic plan.

Before joining DHS, Ms. Emerson was the Assistant Administrator for Human Resource Management at the Federal Aviation Administration. Ms. Emerson advised and assisted the Administrator in directing, coordinating, communicating and leading an effective human resources program that supported a workforce responsible for ensuring the safety and efficiency of the national airspace system.

While employed at the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA), she served as the Director of Policy and Performance Management / Chief Human Capital Officer and the Acting Executive Director for the FLRA. From July 2008 to October 2008, she served as the FLRA's administrative head in absence of a presidentially appointed Chairman. Ms. Emerson is the only federal career employee at the FLRA to have performed this function.

Prior to joining the FLRA, Ms. Emerson served as an Assistant Director in the Office of Human Resources, Justice Management Division, U.S. Department of Justice, where in October 2007, she received the Attorney General's John Marshall Award, the Department's highest award presented to attorneys for contributions and excellence in legal performance. While at the Justice Department, Ms. Emerson also received several Justice Management Division Special Commendation Awards.

Ms. Emerson holds a B.A. and J.D. from The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. She is a member of the Maryland and District of Columbia Bars.

###