

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 15, 2016

The Honorable Beth F. Cobert  
Acting Director  
U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
1900 E Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20415-1000

Dear Director Cobert:

The Office of Personnel Management's February 8, 2016 proposed rule would reduce the number of required survey questions on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS),<sup>1</sup> an annual survey of federal employees that helps measure employee morale, engagement, and satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> The survey is a crucial tool for assessing the environment that federal employees experience in the workplace. The push by OPM to eliminate certain questions and answers from the FEVS raises the prospect of undermining Congress' ability to assist the federal workforce.

The proposed changes to the regulation reduce the number of required government-wide survey questions from 45 to 11. While your staff has assured us that OPM does not plan to make any significant survey changes for the 2017 FEVS, the proposal allows future administrations to eliminate questions not mandated by regulation. Should OPM stop asking key survey questions in the future, it interferes with our ability to compare future employee responses to historical trends.

The proposed rule may also have unintended consequences for agency performance. Understanding employee satisfaction has a corresponding effect on understanding barriers to increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the federal bureaucracy. It is difficult to address shortcomings related to agency performance without data about employees' engagement and satisfaction.

Congress has used data from the annual surveys to inform oversight and reform efforts at executive agencies. The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, with jurisdiction over federal employees generally, takes great interest in the annual results and survey long-term trends. In addition, as authorizers for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Homeland Security, the data is particularly important as it has shown both of those agencies rank at the bottom of employee engagement and satisfaction measures. While those agencies have seen positive improvements in the most recent edition of the survey, we strongly believe that work remains.

Certain questions currently prescribed in regulation may benefit from refinement or clarification, but a drastic change, such as the one proposed in OPM's new rule, is unnecessary. As you consider changes to the survey regulation, we urge you to prioritize data quality and continuity to allow comparisons of survey data over time. You should continue to ask the survey

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Personnel Management, *Personnel Management in Agencies*, 81 Fed. Reg. 6469, 6471 (Feb. 8, 2016) (proposed rule).

<sup>2</sup> Survey authorized in Pub. L. No. 108-136 (2003), the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 (Sec. 1128). OPM's survey regulations are codified at 5 C.F.R. 250, Subpart C.

The Honorable Beth F. Cobert  
November 15, 2016  
Page 2

questions currently mandated by regulation with minimal clarifying edits in the 2017 FEVS, and in future editions of the FEVS. Your agency should also maintain questions currently asked in the FEVS but not necessarily codified in regulation that are used to measure employee engagement and satisfaction. Doing so will allow Congress to help federal employees by collecting the information we need regarding their morale, engagement, and satisfaction.

Please contact Kevin Ortiz of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform at (202) 225-5074, Kelsey Baron of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs at (202) 225-3527, or Diana Bergwin of the Committee on Homeland Security at (202) 226-8417 with any questions about this letter. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jason Chaffetz  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight  
and Government Reform



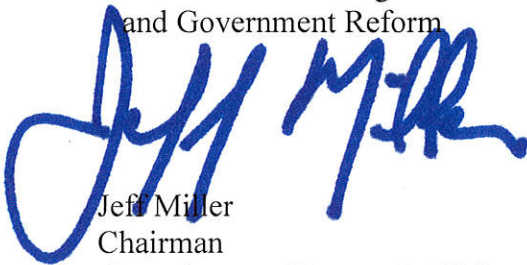
Elijah E. Cummings  
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Committee on Oversight  
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Subcommittee on Government Operations  
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