

**Statement by Colleen Allen
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before the
Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
U.S. House of Representatives
“Oversight of Federal Agencies’ Post-Pandemic Telework Policies: Part II”
October 18, 2023**

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Mfume, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the U.S. Agency for International Development. The Agency appreciates the opportunity to share how USAID’s talented and diverse workforce continues to confront the most unprecedented global challenges following the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Since its beginnings in 1961, USAID has been deeply rooted in ambitious ideals to provide a positive global impact by providing aid from the American people. USAID’s work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity and demonstrates the generosity of the United States. Today, the agency’s vision claims the caring intent at the heart of the Agency’s inception. We are at an inflection point where our work, the responsibilities of every USAID employee, is inextricably linked to our goals to expand democracy and free markets while partnering with local communities, organizations, and citizens. Local citizens who are invested in making their lives better, often while recovering from natural and man-made disasters or striving to live freely in their countries.

USAID’s organizational reach spans over 80 countries with over 13,000 staff working in a vast range of technical and management functions. People who decide to work at USAID join to fulfill the global mission to make the world a better place by touching the everyday lives of millions of people in the countries where we work. USAID’s employee engagement scores represent the high levels of our staff’s commitment to the mission of the Agency, with our employee

engagement scores hitting 74% in 2022. Our strength depends on our people who make impactful progress around the world and who continue to win victories against the unrelenting march of global challenges.

Our impacts are across the development and humanitarian assistance spectrum. Over the past three years, USAID has responded to 75 crises in more than 70 countries, providing food, water, shelter, health care, protection, and other critical aid to people who need it most.

USAID's dedicated efforts to improve maternal and child survival have achieved significant progress: under-five child mortality has witnessed a remarkable decline of 58%, and maternal mortality has decreased by 42% since 2000. In support of the U.S. Government's Global Water Strategy, USAID has helped 64.9 million people gain access to sustainable drinking water and 50.8 million people gain access to sustainable sanitation services by mobilizing \$465 million in new funding for water and sanitation.

USAID is unique in that we are a domestic and international workforce with culturally and geographically diverse tasks. By our very nature, we have to be mobile, respectful towards intercultural diversity, and foster our human capital so they are skilled in collaborating with geographically dispersed colleagues as well as national governments, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations who help implement USAID's programs.

USAID has been an award-winning Federal leader in information technology, having been awarded 8 FITARA scorecard "A"s. Our particular strength in this area has meant being agile to pivot to support various types of telework for the Agency's domestic workforce. For years, our agency has been integrating web-based tools to foster online collaboration, appropriately manage Agency data, and provide secure access to information whether working overseas, in the office in Washington D.C., at home, or on temporary duty. In fact, USAID was ahead of the curve and moved to a secure government cloud environment more than a decade ago. As a direct result of this investment, when the March 2020 Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) mandatory telework posture directive was issued, USAID successfully pivoted its global operations to a secure and productive telework environment. Our critical investments in information technologies provided a firm foundation to allow the workforce to be nimble,

flexible, and ready to keep operations on track to continue to achieve our foreign policy and development goals.

As with many other U.S. Government departments and agencies, USAID staff have had the option to use workplace flexibilities prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Expanding telework options for our staff has allowed us all to continue our meaningful work.

USAID has developed and implemented a unique set of telework policies that met the operational needs of the Agency by using flexibilities that incorporate meaningful in-person work with telework and remote work schedules. While our staff worked tirelessly through the pandemic, and while taking advantage of telework, our performance as an Agency excelled and staff achieved more than we would have imagined. In addition to our staff being able to continue their daily work, telework and our workplace flexibility increased their ability to navigate other challenges to their personal lives that the pandemic presented.

These workplace flexibilities have been a valuable recruitment and retention tool for strengthening our operations.

In response to the OMB M-23-15, USAID established a Work Environment Working Group consisting of senior leaders across the Agency to determine the strategic approach to assessing our work environment. Based on this group's recommendations, the Agency has increased in-person presence to three or more days a week to their assigned Washington, D.C. work location. USAID continues to offer staff two types of telework arrangements. An employee can have a regular, recurring telework arrangement where the supervisor has pre-approved a set schedule of telework days per pay period. Or, an employee can have a supervisor approved situational or unscheduled telework arrangement where an employee performs telework on an irregular, unscheduled, or case-by-case basis and the employee does not have an ongoing and set telework schedule.

Workforce flexibilities, which telework and remote work are at the heart of, allow USAID to attract and maintain a robust, dedicated, crisis-ready, highly-talented, and culturally-intelligent workforce. USAID leadership has empowered Agency staff to employ the appropriate workplace flexibilities needed so we can continue to accomplish the Agency's shared mission and goals efficiently and effectively. Through monitoring our work environment, we have built upon our efforts to

increase intentional engagement for building social capital, hybrid and in-person on-the-job training, expanding mentoring and coaching opportunities, supporting the psychological safety of our staff, and adapting our Agency culture.

USAID's work is rooted in evidenced-based qualitative and quantitative methodologies and has been leading within the interagency in showcasing its organizational performance management tools. In Fiscal Year 2021, USAID launched an Organizational Health Index (OHI) as a management tool to measure our workplace environment and organizational performance. The OHI brings together 50 different data sources so Agency leadership can monitor and address any operational or programmatic weaknesses and build on the successes. Our employee engagement and customer service scores continue to be high post pandemic as we have adjusted our work posture and continue to use a range of workplace flexibilities.

While we are proud of our successes, we recognize that we need to continually evaluate and adjust as our workforce acclimates to an increased in-person presence. Senior leaders Agency-wide continuously work to develop and refine how we measure and evaluate our Agency's performance as we move toward new telework guidelines for our work environment.

Our mission and our people are our top priorities and we know our Agency thrives when our staff are empowered and our programs and policies are well managed. Our employees have shown that when using telework and other work environment tools effectively, our capacity for success is not diminished during international crises or unexpected global events. Implementing our work environment plan ensures that headquarters staff in Washington, D.C. are aligned with agency work environment decisions as we continually improve our organization's health and performance.

We pride ourselves on being nimble when answering the call when disaster happens, improving livelihoods across the globe, and being the embodiment of our motto—"from the American people." I look forward to discussing this important matter on behalf of USAID with your Committee and other members of Congress, and their staff. Once again, thank you for this opportunity and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.