

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

Developing Federal Employees and Supervisors: Mentoring, Internships, and Training in the Federal Government

Hearing Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Today, the Federal government confronts some of the most serious challenges in our nation's history. Each day, approximately two million civil servants sacrifice to protect our country from attack, serve our nation's veterans, provide for the needy, and otherwise improve the lives of Americans.

For too long, however, we have failed to provide Federal employees with the tools they need to be successful. Agencies often cut employee training and development programs to stretch limited funding. Federal employees are left to execute their missions without the resources and support they need.

As a former teacher, I understand that individuals need guidance and nurturing to excel. In order to provide the efficient and effective government programs taxpayers should expect, we must invest in Federal employee training and development programs.

By 2014, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) estimates that nearly 500,000 Federal employees, including a large number of supervisors, will retire. The Department of Defense (DOD), our largest Federal agency, is projected to lose approximately 20 percent of its workforce to retirement by 2012.

These impending retirements make training and developing Federal employees even more urgent. Federal agencies must take steps now to ensure that a new generation of employees is ready to lead when this retirement wave hits.

My Federal Supervisor Training Act (S. 674) addresses this need. Often, new supervisors have no prior management experience and receive little training on how to be a good manager. My bill would require each Federal agency to provide mandatory training to new supervisors and re-training every three years.

The bill would require training on topics including setting employee performance goals; mentoring and motivating employees; fostering a fair and respectful work environment; addressing poor performance; employee whistleblower, non-discrimination, and other rights and protections, and other important topics.

Supervisor training promotes better manager-employee relationships, improves communication, reduces conflict, and otherwise helps supervisors do their jobs better. And better supervisor performance leads to more effective government. Good supervisors motivate and empower their

employees, which improves agency productivity and saves taxpayers money. Because of the many benefits of supervisor training, my bill is broadly supported by both labor and management groups.

I was pleased that the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 contained nearly identical requirements for DOD employees. Additionally, OPM issued regulations last year to require more effective Federal supervisor training. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the progress being made in this area.

While these are positive developments, I believe legislation is needed to ensure that all supervisors receive the training and resources they need to perform well.

Internship and apprenticeship programs can be a good avenue for focused training and development of new employees. I am particularly proud of the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard's apprentice program, which annually attracts about 5,000 applicants for 125 to 150 apprenticeships. Apprentices learn a trade and earn an associate's degree from the Honolulu Community College through this four-year paid work-study program.

While I am a long-time supporter of valid internship programs, I am concerned about the increased use of the Federal Career Internship Program as a hiring authority. More than half of employees at grades 5, 7, and 9 of the General Schedule – or more than 22,000 employees per year – are now hired through this program. Many of these employees receive little of the focused training and development that is required under the Executive Order establishing the program.

Labeling a hiring authority used for a wide range of positions as an internship program may weaken agencies' commitment to investing in real internships for focused employee development.

Moreover, many have complained that agencies do not always honor veterans' preference and other competitive service requirements when hiring through this program. As the Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and an ardent proponent of the merit system, the broad use of this program is very concerning to me.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on these very important issues.

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