



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE
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U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT**

before the

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE
FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
UNITED STATES SENATE**

on

‘INSPIRING STUDENTS TO FEDERAL SERVICE’

June 21, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Senator Johnson, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) efforts to improve the way the Federal government recruits and hires students. We are excited about what we have already accomplished through hiring reform, the launch of our Pathways Programs, and other measures we are taking at OPM as both an employer and as the Federal government's HR advisor.

Overview of Hiring Reform Initiative

More than two years ago, we embarked on a broad initiative to reform the Federal hiring process. Along the way, we have addressed systemic problems by overhauling the USAJOBS website to make it more efficient and user-friendly, reducing long job announcements, and shrinking the time it takes to fill mission-critical positions. We have created "USAJOBSRecruit" to serve as a one-stop recruiting site for Federal agencies. This new website provides information, tools, and guidance on recruitment; and encourages agency collaboration through the use of discussion forums and blogs. Agencies can find tools and resources for their day-to-day operations, as well as learn from their peers and experts in the field on how to recruit a world-class Federal workforce. We have also taken on targeted approaches to improving the recruitment and hiring of talented men and women. The intersection of these various reform initiatives is creating a new applicant-friendly environment that will allow us to compete with the private sector for a diverse and talented workforce, as well as honoring the service of our veterans.

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Hiring Reform has several major components, all of which, in one way or another, create opportunities to improve Federal employment options. Last year, the President issued a memorandum directing Federal agencies to take certain steps to make the process easier for talented candidates to apply for Federal employment. These include the elimination of essay-style questions as part of the initial application for a Federal job, allowing job-seekers to apply instead with just a resume and cover letter, and providing hiring managers with more choices through category rating. The memorandum also requires agencies to ensure that supervisors and managers are more involved in the hiring process – including workforce planning, recruitment, and interviewing – and that they are held accountable for the quality of their hires and for supporting the successful transition of new hires into the Federal service. Tremendous progress has been made on all of these fronts.

Additionally, I am proud of the work that OPM and other Federal agencies have done in implementing President Obama's Executive orders launching the Veterans Employment Initiative and creating greater employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We hired 2000 more veterans last year, despite a decrease in the overall number of Federal jobs. And agencies are making strides toward the President's goal of hiring 100,000 people with disabilities over the next five years. They are beginning aggressive efforts to tap into the tremendous talents of people with disabilities, a long neglected segment of our society with a lot to offer the Federal government.

Pathways Executive Order

The Pathways Programs are another major component of hiring reform. On December 27, 2010, President Obama signed Executive Order 13562, entitled "Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates." This Executive order lays the groundwork for improving recruiting efforts; offers clear paths to Federal internships for students from high school through the post-graduate level and to careers for recent graduates; and provides for meaningful training and career development opportunities for individuals who are at the beginning of their Federal careers. The three programs included in the Pathways framework are: an Internship Program, a Recent Graduates Program, and a reinvigorated Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program.

The Pathways concept was the product of an inter-agency study spearheaded by OPM, which concluded that the Government was at a serious competitive disadvantage compared to the private sector in its ability to recruit and hire students and recent graduates. The inter-agency team recommended a consolidated pathways approach as a way to overcome this disadvantage. After receiving this recommendation, OPM undertook a comprehensive review of the issue that included a literature review, a day-long public hearing where three panels of experts presented testimony, and solicitation of public comments. OPM ultimately agreed that the Pathways concept was the appropriate way to proceed, and we designed a framework to implement that concept, reflected in the Executive order.

Although under the Executive order certain positions will be excepted from competitive hiring requirements, we view the Pathways framework as a supplement to the competitive hiring

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process, not a substitute for it. It will allow the Federal government to compete more effectively with the private sector for promising candidates who may be short on experience, but long on potential. And we think it will be a vehicle through which we can improve diversity of the Federal workforce through strategic outreach and recruiting strategies.

Under the new framework, the Internship Program will target students enrolled in institutions at all levels, ranging from high school to doctoral programs. It will replace the existing Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), and, through our implementing regulations, the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). Students and, frankly, even managers and HR practitioners, have found the old acronyms to be confusing and off-putting. Moreover, while there was meant to be a distinction in the level and rigor of the work assigned to STEPs and SCEPs, in practice, we found wide variation in the application of that standard in practice, and many STEPs weren't being afforded the eligibility to convert to a permanent position. Our new program is simple – we call participants Interns, which is what they think of themselves as anyway, and all Intern positions are eligible for conversion to permanent Federal service.

The Recent Graduates Program will be designed for recent graduates of trade and vocational schools, community colleges, and universities. Applicants who are accepted into the Recent Graduates Program will be placed in a two-year development program with a cohort of peers hired during timeframes aligned with academic calendars. To be eligible, applicants must apply within two years after completing their degree (except that veterans precluded from doing so due to their military service obligation will have up to six years after degree completion in which to apply). Those who successfully complete the program will be considered for placement into permanent jobs.

The PMF Program is an existing program that we are looking to reinvigorate. The PMF Program was designed to develop a cadre of prospective Government leaders. Though it has gone through many changes over the years, it remains the Federal Government's premier leadership development program for people with advanced degrees. The Pathways Executive order aims to strengthen the PMF Program by expanding the eligibility window for applicants to include those who have received an advanced degree within the preceding two years. It also directs OPM to set eligibility requirements and minimum qualification standards, and to make changes in order to make the PMF experience more robust and substantive for participants.

Under our administrative prerogative, we've already taken steps to reinvigorate the program. For the class that applied in the fall 2010, we restored the in-person assessment centers. For the last five years, we've selected candidates for a "Presidential" program solely on the basis of a multiple-choice test. Recognizing that there's got to be a human touch, we made this investment to elevate the cachet of the Program and to drive towards higher quality finalists.

This year's orientation session for nearly 600 PMFs from the Class of 2009 was held in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Instead of teaching PMFs leadership through PowerPoint slides, we opted for an experiential program based on the Battle of Gettysburg.

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As directed by the President, OPM has been drafting the regulations that will establish these new pathways throughout the Federal Government. We expect to issue proposed regulations implementing this initiative in the near future.

OPM Specific Efforts on Interns and PMF

In addition to our efforts to spearhead the program paths included in the Pathways Programs framework, we are also working to enhance our internal Agency programs for student interns and PMFs. We have long recognized the value in investing in students and recent graduates as a pipeline for permanent career employment; on average, more than 90% of interns in our Student Career Experience Program are converted to a permanent appointment after successfully completing their degree and work-hour requirements. And this year, we have stepped up our efforts to recruit and hire PMFs, with plans to more than quadruple the number of PMFs hired within our Agency. Frankly, in these challenging budgetary times where agencies are sharing in the sacrifices being made by the American people by having their budgets reduced, we think it makes economic sense for agencies to look more to the PMF finalist pool, as we have done, because it is an excellent source of talented individuals who have already been recruited and rigorously assessed by OPM.

In addition, through our unique “Adopt-A-School” program with Theodore Roosevelt Senior High School in Washington, DC, we are tapping into the diverse talent in our local community by offering paid internship opportunities, ongoing engagement activities with the school, and a formal mentoring program where OPM employees can volunteer their personal time to support students who are at risk of dropping out and help them set and meet high expectations for high school and beyond.

Through our partnership with the Urban Alliance, a nonprofit organization that runs a competitive internship program, we also provide employment, mentoring, and developmental opportunities for bright and talented senior high school students. In addition to providing training sessions to our student interns on topics such as career opportunities in the Federal Government, résumé writing, and interviewing, we also arrange for unique enrichment opportunities. Past activities have included a visit to the U.S. Capitol where the students met their Congressional representatives; an opportunity for the students to be recognized at an Agencywide Town Hall meeting where they introduced themselves and their goals; and an opportunity for one of the students to introduce the Director at a local high school event where the Director spoke about his own career path and the opportunities and career options that lay ahead for students in the Federal workforce.

Outreach to Students and Educational Institutions

OPM conducts extensive outreach to students and educational institutions with a particular emphasis on enhancing diversity within the overall Federal workforce. For example, through the Call to Serve initiative, OPM works in collaboration with the Partnership for Public Service to educate a new generation of leaders about the importance and value of public service, help re-

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establish links between Federal agencies and college campuses, and provide students with information about Federal jobs. This network reaches more than 700 schools and more than 75 Federal agencies. We have also conducted joint training workshops at Federal Service Summits, showcasing best practices and other key resources in the area of Federal employment, while encouraging connections between Federal agencies and higher education staff and faculty.

The Student Program Office at OPM conducts outreach activities on college campuses and non-profit organizations with a strong focus on diverse populations. Informational sessions are held to attract students to the Federal Government and help them learn about employment opportunities and how to navigate the hiring process. The office also participates in the Hispanic Council on Federal Employment.

Recent efforts along these lines include OPM's participation in March in the "Heroes and Heritage Student Leadership Summit" at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where I discussed Federal service and the new Student Pathways Programs. OPM had a significant media presence there, including on local talk radio, the San Antonio Express-News, the San Antonio Business Journal, La Prensa (a bilingual publication), and Univision.

In the same month, the Los Angeles Federal Executive Board hosted an event that I attended to discuss opportunities for students and recent grads vis-a-vis the Pathways Programs Executive Order. The event was in a roundtable format, and the crowd was engaged and asked sophisticated, insightful questions. The group included local colleges and universities, some federal employees from the region, and members of the newly-formed LA chapter of Young Government Leaders. After hearing from the younger participants in the room, I left inspired by their energy and enthusiasm for public service.

We are also reaching out to diverse communities. For example, OPM attended a Career Day event at Haskell University, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and other schools. Upcoming events include Federal Asian Pacific-American Conference Student Career Day in Bellevue, Washington, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Government event at George Washington University.

In addition to our externally-focused activities, we are also focused on student outreach and hiring diverse talent within our own Agency. As part of our overall recruiting strategy, we have participated in dozens of career fairs and conferences at diverse educational institutions around the country, where we have provided information about student employment opportunities within our own Agency and conducted sessions on how to conduct a job search and apply for Federal jobs. These recruitment and outreach efforts have included a wide variety of institutions, including HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions and tribal colleges and universities such as Coppin State University, Howard University, Norfolk State University, Hampton University, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic University, New Mexico State University, University of New Mexico, Central New Mexico College, California State University, and others. We also periodically sponsor students from programs such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) National Internship Program, and the Conference on Asian Pacific

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American Leadership (CAPAL) Internship Program. We have also made a concerted effort to tap into the talent pool of students with disabilities, and over the past year we have hired a total of six student interns with disabilities from the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP), and we have identified three additional students with disabilities from our relationship with the American Association of People with Disabilities whom we are in the process of hiring for internships.

I should make the point that while outreach and education are crucial, OPM has moved beyond simple outreach to these groups and has taken innovative steps to deepen community participation in our efforts.

Let me give you an example. As with any regulations, our proposed regulations to implement the President's Executive order will be published in the Federal Register to allow the public to offer comment. Unfortunately, if you are a student – or a parent – who lives outside the Washington Beltway, you probably don't know what the Federal Register is, let alone how you begin to offer comments.

We are writing regulations that will impact students across the country, so it is important to us to actually hear from the communities we will be serving. As a result, as OPM talks about these Pathways Programs, we have begun to educate students and communities about how they can review our proposed regulations once published in the Federal Register, and how they can offer their own viewpoints on how we should shape these regulations. Moreover, we have given them the promise that we will review and consider every comment submitted. We'll be using forums and social media to help individuals understand how they have the ability to shape our regulations once they are published. This helps demystify the process for enacting regulations, and secures deeper participation from those we are seeking to serve.

Supervisory Training and Mentorship Opportunities

It is hard to see how there can be any disagreement about the importance of providing managers and supervisors with the training they need to succeed. Numerous studies link the performance of supervisors and managers to workforce retention and organizational performance. Requiring agencies to provide such training sends a strong message that well-trained managers are critical to the success of an organization and that supervisors and managers are accountable for their performance. Emphasizing the importance of supervisory training also makes it clear that supervisory skills are valued in their own right and that the opportunity to become a supervisor or manager is not merely a reward for achievements unrelated to one's potential as a supervisor.

Mr. Chairman, we at OPM appreciate your efforts over the years to move the Government forward in its approach to supervisory training. More than a year ago, OPM published final regulations which specifically require supervisory training within one year of a new supervisor's appointment and retraining at least once every three years on options and strategies to:

- Mentor employees;

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- Improve employees' performance and productivity;
- Conduct performance appraisals; and
- Assist employees in addressing unacceptable performance

Agencies must also provide training to employees when they make significant transitions. This could include, for example, movement from a non-supervisory position to a management position, or from a management job to an executive post. OPM has developed guidance, which is included in a newly revised training policy handbook to assist agencies in implementing the final regulations.

In March, OPM launched the OPM Mentoring Pilot, pairing some of the agency's experienced leaders with more junior employees. By establishing these meaningful relationships, OPM hopes to enhance employee morale and organizational commitment; identify and close employee competency gaps to improve effectiveness; and develop a fully engaged and high-performing workforce within the agency. This will also be essential in OPM's succession planning. Director Berry and I both currently serve as mentors for the Pilot program.

Some larger agencies have established supervisory mentoring programs as part of their succession planning efforts. New supervisors can benefit from having mentors themselves, as well as from learning how to be mentors for their employees. Though we are seeing more of both kinds of mentoring, there is always more we can do to facilitate it.

Mentoring is critical and can happen in many ways -- through formal programs and through day-to-day interaction with one's supervisors and fellow employees. The Federal Workforce Flexibility Act requires agencies to provide training to managers and supervisors on mentoring their employees. Within the Federal Government, mentoring is often a component in developmental programs like the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP), the PMF Program, or the USDA Graduate School Executive Leadership Program (ELP).

Many agencies run formal stand-alone mentoring programs to enhance personal and career development. Formal mentoring programs have structure, oversight, and clear and specific organizational goals. To assist agencies in the development of successful mentoring programs, OPM recently issued a publication on mentoring best practices and hosted a "Best Practices in Mentoring" forum where five agencies discussed their mentoring programs with the Federal learning and development community. Agencies need to ensure that employees who are interested in mentoring are provided that opportunity, to stimulate individual growth, provide career enhancement, and thereby strengthen the agencies' capacity to retain valued employees.

In addition, OPM has provided train-the-trainer sessions for agency human resources practitioners on developing a strategic "on-boarding" program to maximize employee productivity, engagement, and retention. On-boarding is not limited to orientation or mentoring; it is an ongoing process that includes welcoming, training, and acculturating a new hire. Many agencies reported providing formal and informal mentoring programs for their employees and

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interns. These mentoring programs provide supervisors and seasoned employees with an opportunity to share their knowledge, expertise, and experience with other employees interested in developing their skills and enhancing their careers.

Mentoring is also an integral part of developing and retaining a diverse workforce. Federal agencies need managers and supervisors with the skills to manage and mentor diverse populations. Managing diversity within the workplace means creating an environment where everyone is empowered to contribute to the work of the unit; it requires sensitivity to and awareness of the interactions among staff and between staff and leadership, and knowing how to articulate clear expectations. Effective mentoring in a multicultural setting involves understanding diverse learning styles and approaches to problem-solving, as well as other cultural differences, and appreciating how to use those differences to serve the organization's mission. Mentoring to diverse populations is crucial to meeting and exceeding organizational goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, over the past two years, OPM has worked closely with the President and OMB to reform the Federal hiring process. We have paid special attention to the unique challenges faced by veterans, people with disabilities, and students and recent grads, in addition to our overall focus on creating a more diverse, effective, and efficient Federal workforce. The Pathways Programs will provide strong tools to improve our recruiting efforts and to provide a clear path for students and recent graduates to join Federal sector employment. As we work to bring those programs to fruition, we are also working on a parallel track to make immediate improvements in the areas of recruiting, training, and mentoring.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to discuss this important work with you and the subcommittee. I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.