



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

**STATEMENT OF
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before the

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON REGULATORY AFFAIRS AND FEDERAL MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

on

“Examining Federal Managers’ Role in Hiring”

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March 1, 2018

Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Heitkamp, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the important topics of hiring and supervisory training and development. The day-to-day operational aspects of the hiring process are carried out by Federal agencies, but the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) plays an important role in promulgating regulations and issuing guidance necessary to execute Federal civil service laws. OPM also provides oversight, leadership, tools, and assistance to help agencies in meeting their hiring needs in the most effective, efficient, and timely way possible. Agency heads look to OPM to help with meeting their statutory responsibilities to establish and operate training programs for their employees, including those in supervisory and leadership positions. As the Associate Director for Employee Services at OPM, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss how OPM is working with agencies to help them address challenges and to execute their responsibilities in these important areas.

Hiring is often cited as an area of challenge both by Federal agencies and members of the public seeking Federal employment. OPM recognizes that the laws and regulations governing hiring are complex and in need of reform, and we are proactively working with agencies to simplify hiring practices. This will allow agencies to bring on employees best aligned with the agency mission, allowing the agency to best serve the American public. We have to take a fresh look at how the system can be improved to better meet the needs of a 21st century Government. Federal jobs can sometimes take more than a year to fill, and job announcements are often confusing to applicants, creating impediments that can deter applicants from considering Federal employment. Federal hiring managers are often frustrated by layers of rules, cumbersome and inefficient

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processes, and desire improved support for their hiring responsibilities. We can always do better, and we continue to strive to do better. We aim to meet our goal of improving the hiring process by: helping agencies strengthen Human Resources (HR) support and service to hiring managers; leveraging tools to identify and select the best talent; and addressing hiring barriers through advancing substantive reforms. A few highlights of OPM's recent work just this year to help support improved hiring in agencies include: hosting four multi-day technical training classes for agency HR staff who provide staffing services; issuing a comprehensive Question and Answer guide on how to share certificates between agencies; new streamlined templates agencies can use to request approval to offer higher amounts of recruitment and retention incentives; a "Fast Facts" guide on Federal hiring authorities/flexibilities; and approval of an extensive Direct Hire Authority to help support an agency's critical need to address severe recruiting difficulties. We are focused on both proactively assisting agencies with hiring top talent to serve the American public and improving the applicant experience through better communication. OPM also recognizes the tension applicants face between accepting jobs in the private sector and Federal sector when the hiring process is cumbersome and lengthy. We must continue to work with agencies to bring America's best and brightest into public service with a renewed effort to highlight the importance of serving the American public.

OPM developed a number of legislative proposals that were delivered to Congress last year that we believe will better enable agencies to recruit highly talented individuals to meet their workforce needs. The Administration continues to support these Government-wide policy proposals, and would like to thank Chairman Lankford for sponsoring some of these proposals. OPM also appreciates Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Heitkamp, and the full Committee's work in advancing the proposals that Chairman Lankford sponsored. We look forward to continuing our work with the Committee to ensure their enactment.

In 2010, OPM and the 24 Chief Financial Officers Act agencies initiated a concerted effort to improve the Federal hiring process. Today we are reinforcing our efforts with our full acknowledgement of the importance this has to our Federal Government. The initiative was prominently focused on improving agency execution of the hiring process, with particular emphasis on shortening the time required to hire and reducing the burden on applicants. OPM led efforts to map the hiring process and developed an end-to-end 80-day hiring model, and worked with agencies to begin measuring and collecting time-to-hire data to help track agency progress. The average time-to-hire for FY 2017 is just under 106 days, which includes all hires where a job announcement was posted on USAJOBS. This is an improvement from the 122-day baseline established in 2009, but disappointing considering the 87-day average that agencies achieved overall in FY 2012. The average time-to-hire has increased each year since 2012. We are committed to aiding agencies in surpassing their previous reductions and realizing a system of hiring that meets the needs of the Federal Government.

The 80-day end-to-end hiring model identifies the key components of the hiring process from pre-planning through onboarding, along with aggressive target timeframes for accomplishing each step – in accordance with the Merit System principles our Government has long depended on for the civil service. Many of the core elements and steps in the Federal hiring process are not

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unlike the hiring process in other sectors and include: identifying job duties and qualifications sought; recruiting and advertising the job opening to solicit applications; narrowing the pool of finalists through interviews or other assessments; making a job offer; and, finally, onboarding the employee as the culmination of the process. Additional elements of the Federal hiring process that differ from common practice in other sectors include: a background investigation process; adherence to veterans preference in accordance with longstanding statutory requirements; prescriptive selection rules designed to promote hiring based on merit and help protect against political influence, nepotism, or public perceptions of impropriety; and requirements for public notice of Federal job openings to further the objective of a fair and open process in which members of the public who are interested in such opportunities can find out about and apply for openings.

More specifically, the 80-day end-to-end hiring model includes planning and administrative elements that are not visible to applicants, such as time for the hiring manager to review the hiring need against staffing and budget plans and to initiate the action to fill the job; and time for HR in collaboration with the hiring manager to review the job description, confirm the qualification requirements and assessment/evaluation strategy, and create and post a job opportunity announcement (JOA). Once the JOA has been posted, HR receives applications, evaluates candidates to identify those whose qualifications best match the job being filled, issues a referral list of top candidates, and notifies candidates on the disposition of their application. Next, hiring managers review applications, schedule and conduct interviews, check references, and notify HR of their selection. At this point, HR extends a tentative job offer and the candidate indicates acceptance. Fingerprinting is then completed and the candidate's background investigation is initiated. As for the last steps, a final offer is made, which the candidate decides to accept or not, and the candidate reports to duty following a traditional two week notice. Under this model, about 30 days of the 80-day model are on the candidate's radar screen beginning with the close of the JOA until a selection is made.

We recognize that time-to-hire is not a perfect metric for success. We must also look at the quality of the hire, and we must make sure that we are hiring people with skill sets that are fully aligned with agencies' current and projected mission needs. As agencies began to demonstrate that reducing time-to-hire was achievable, the hiring improvement initiative was expanded to assure attention not only to the speed of hiring, but also the quality of the hire. Informed by various data sources such as management satisfaction with the quality of referred job candidates, OPM expanded efforts to help drive broader improvements to the quality of hiring. We continue to focus on these efforts, and are putting tools in place to enable HR professionals and managers to achieve these multi-dimensional goals, and further the Administration's goal of reducing burdens in the hiring process. Proactive measures include investing in better tools and technology to support hiring, such as: more robust applicant assessment tools; development of a technology based "wizard" to offer managers direct input into hiring activities; building the capacity of the HR workforce through training and institutionalizing HR capabilities across Government; and empowering managers to actively participate in the hiring process.

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As part of OPM's goal to support improvements in agency hiring programs, OPM has been leading efforts to help grow the capability of the Federal HR workforce. This year, OPM launched the Federal Human Resources Institute. The Institute will soon offer more robust training than was previously available and develop curricula that will provide a standard and comprehensive framework for how HR professionals are trained to deliver important HR services such as staffing, position classification, employee performance management and accountability, and other functional areas. A 22-course staffing specialist curricula is being rolled out and will be fully available by the end of FY 2018, with the launch of additional curricula for other specialty areas planned for 2019. OPM is also launching a new interagency developmental program through which OPM will host HR professionals for 9 to 12 months in various OPM policy offices. The goal of the program will be to enable HR professionals to develop highly needed expertise in important policy areas, broaden organizational experience, build Government-wide networks to improve participants' abilities to assume Human Capital leadership roles, and develop critical strategic consultative skills.

OPM is also looking at ways to provide tools to agencies that can help them improve the way they assess hundreds of thousands of applications for Federal jobs. USA HireSM is a professionally-designed library of more than 900 off-the-shelf assessment solutions created to target specific competencies, occupations, and/or job families. These assessments cover more than 75 occupational series. The assessments' use of cutting-edge techniques like online simulations and avatar-based assessment items are realistic and engaging to job applicants. In addition to providing refined competency measurements to produce higher quality candidates, the assessments can help reduce time-to-hire because they are scored automatically and reduce the burden involved in administering more traditional assessments, particularly in cases where large numbers of applicants must be evaluated. Our scoring system efficiently screens out unqualified applicants at the outset, and then reduces the applicant pool to the most qualified job candidates in a particularly effective and efficient way. Reactions from applicants who have used USA HireSM have been overwhelmingly favorable, with 97 percent of applicants reporting the process is user-friendly and over 90 percent reporting satisfaction with the assessment process.

Another effort to support better hiring was OPM's Hiring Excellence Campaign (HEC), an evidence-based initiative designed to focus on proven practices and approaches that support improved hiring outcomes. The HEC honed in on key components of the hiring process and enablers of quality hiring, including the need for collaboration between hiring managers and HR professionals to maximize the full range of recruitment and hiring tools to attract and hire top talent. Through the HEC, the three main successes were – (1) human resources officers and managers have seen the importance of collaborating early and often in the hiring process; (2) improvements have been made to workforce planning for strategic recruits; and (3) agencies are now reporting that they are aware of better options for assessments in order to attract the best talent. OPM will continue to work with agencies to leverage this information and use it to implement the joint goals of hiring qualified candidates while reducing overall time to hire.

OPM is also working to educate agencies on the full range of hiring authorities currently available to support their hiring needs. As members of this Subcommittee are aware, there is a

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multitude of hiring authorities available, some of which are only available to certain agencies, not well-understood, or not leveraged due to individual agency cultures or preference. This can be confusing for both human resources and hiring managers on the front lines.

These authorities include Excepted Service hiring authorities used to provide alternatives when regular competitive hiring procedures are impractical (for example, an emergency short-term hiring need) or to address special needs (for example, special appointments for veterans, people with severe disabilities, or groups such as students and recent graduates who may be disadvantaged in a competitive hiring process that favors applicants with job experience).

Direct Hire Authority is another type of appointing authority OPM can provide to Federal agencies for filling competitive service vacancies when either a severe shortage of candidates or other critical hiring need exists. Because Direct Hire Authority eliminates obligations that would otherwise apply in a normal competitive hiring process (such as the requirement to provide veterans preference, or to rate and rank all candidates based on their qualifications and select the “best qualified”), supporting evidence is needed to demonstrate that such an exception is warranted and meets statutory and regulatory criteria. While Direct Hire Authority still requires public notice of job openings and most other elements/activities laid out in the 80-day end-to-end hiring model, it may reduce time-to-hire because agencies are not required to assess each candidate’s relative degree of the requisite qualifications to determine the best qualified and may essentially hire anyone who meets the needs of the agency and the minimum qualifications. Other special hiring authorities are provided in statute, such as provisions for non-competitive appointment of military spouses, former Peace Corps personnel, and certain National Guard Technicians, to name a few. These authorities may help reduce time-to-hire because job openings do not need to meet regular public notice requirements, which often results in smaller and limited applicant pools, and consequently requires less time to review applications.

OPM is also continuing to work to improve the applicant experience. This includes regular improvements to USAJOBS which are guided by customer feedback. While USAJOBS does not fall under my immediate jurisdiction, I am pleased to highlight a few efforts OPM has made in this area. More than 14,000 Federal job opportunities are available every day on USAJOBS, and each year, 1 billion job searches are conducted on the website and 22 million applications are started. OPM has invested in improving the design, features, and tools to make USAJOBS more user-friendly and to evolve the site from a job board to a full-featured career site. This has included working with stakeholders across the Federal Government, convening work groups, and receiving user feedback through interviews and focus groups. This feedback has resulted in the implementation of user-friendly updates including a mobile-friendly website; a revised application process; improved search and tools; a new help center; a “hiring paths” feature that allows candidates to explore a variety of hiring paths that may be applicable to individuals with certain backgrounds or qualifications such as students, people with disabilities, or those who have never worked in the Federal Government; and an urgent hiring needs page that showcases high demand occupations such as cybersecurity and engineering. Expanded tools, like résumé mining, allow applicants to opt in to have their résumé included in a searchable database where hiring managers can search for candidates with specific skills, educational credentials, or

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certifications, and invite them to apply for openings. Currently more than 1.5 million applicants have opted in to include their résumé in the résumé mining database.

In addition to OPM's work to help improve agencies' ability to execute the hiring process in a timely and efficient way, OPM is also working to provide guidance, tools, and leadership that supports agency heads in meeting their responsibilities to establish and operate training programs for their employees in supervisory and leadership positions. Managers and supervisors in the Federal Government face a great many responsibilities, and agencies benefit from preparing these individuals with the tools necessary to effectively manage and lead employees to carry out each agency's mission. While OPM does, via regulation, require agencies to provide for the development of managers, supervisors, and executives, as well as those who may be identified in agency succession plans as potential candidates for these positions, more attention can be given to this need. Currently, agencies are required to provide training for new supervisors on a specific set of topics including performance management, mentoring, improving performance and productivity, and conducting performance appraisals and dealing with unacceptable performance, with refresher training every three years. Agencies have discretion in how they implement their training, and whether they provide training for other topics. It is important for each agency to conduct a needs assessment to determine what their workforce will benefit from and tailor programs to meet those needs. However, these minimum training requirements, while helpful, do not address the full spectrum of skills and competencies a supervisor needs to be effective.

In order to provide consistency and a standard approach across the Federal Government, OPM has established a Government-wide framework and common standards for supervisory, managerial, and executive development – including required competencies and developmental/learning objectives. OPM's Federal *Supervisory and Managerial Framework* helps provide direction covering both mandatory training and recommended training on leadership competencies and human resources technical knowledge (such as recruitment and selection, workforce planning, and interview skills) important for supervisory and managerial success. The Framework is organized around various stages of the supervisory/managerial progression – from aspiring leader to senior manager – and includes OPM-developed definitions for competencies that should be targeted for development, learning objectives for each competency at each stage of development, suggested learning and developmental activities, and evaluation materials to assist agencies in evaluating the effectiveness of their supervisory and managerial development programs. Through better supervisor training, managers will be better able to assess how their staff contribute to the broader mission and will be better informed and prepared to recruit and retain high-performing employees with critical skill sets.

Hiring the best available talent must be a management priority, administered through a modern system that enables trained and engaged managers to fill jobs with top candidates who meet the current needs of agencies and will excel in their public service to our Nation. With your support, we can get there. Congress can play an important role in these investments, and OPM looks forward to working with you on these efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have.