

GOVERNMENT MANAGERS COALITION

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TESTIMONY OF DARRYL PERKINSON ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT MANAGERS COALITION

Before a Hearing of the

U.S. SENATE HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

ENHANCING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A HEARING ON PENDING LEGISLATION

June 29, 2006

Thank you Chairman Voinovich, Ranking Member Akaka, and Members of the Subcommittee for allowing the Government Managers Coalition to present its views on enhancing employee performance and specifically the Federal Workforce Performance Appraisal and Management Improvement Act of 2006, S. 3492, and the Federal Supervisor Training Act.

My name is Darryl Perkinson, and I am the President of the Federal Managers Association (FMA). Today I testify not only on behalf of the organization I head, but also as a member of the Government Managers Coalition (GMC). The GMC was founded earlier this year to unify the five major federal executive and management associations—the Federal Aviation Administration Managers Association (FAAMA), the Federal Managers Association (FMA), the National Council of Social Security Management Associations (NCSSMA), the Professional Managers Association (PMA), and the Senior Executives Association (SEA)—in advocacy for common-sense solutions to bolster good government throughout the federal workforce.

Our coalition is a deliberative body, and we only put forth positions that have received the unanimous support of the members of the coalition. When we reach unanimity on a position, the GMC speaks for nearly 200,000 federal supervisors, managers, and executives ranging from career Senior Executives to mid-range GS supervisors.

To date, we have endorsed four broad legislative initiatives to improve employee performance:

- Rewarding federal employees for not abusing sick leave;
- An extension of the probationary period for most new employees to two years;

- Clarity on the status and treatment of managers when subordinates file EEO complaints; and finally,
- Mandatory supervisor training and re-training for those who manage other federal employees.

The GMC endorses these initiatives, which we believe will improve the overall effectiveness of managers to enhance employee performance and produce more results for their agencies. However, a manager cannot be expected to inherently know the best methods of performing their duties. Curricula are needed to educate managers at all levels and across all agencies on how best to manage their staff given their unique environment and how best to use the resources available to them. It is clear to us that this does happen to the degree that it should. Mandatory training is the only way to insure we are not only hiring the best and brightest, but giving them the tools to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

For mandatory training to achieve results, we believe there are five critical elements that are essential:

- Every supervisor and manager in the Federal Government must receive mandatory supervisory training within one year of their initial appointment;
- Supervisors and managers should receive updated training every three years after the initial training;
- Training of managers must become a priority within in each Federal Agency and Department;
- A specific authorization of federal funds must be made to underwrite the cost of training that is in addition to money currently allocated to each Agency and Department for personnel costs; and,
- Managers must be afforded participation in processes that arise from constructed feedback and evaluations required of them from this legislation.

The GMC is pleased that this committee recognizes the need for mandatory training programs to be implemented for all supervisors and managers throughout government. Current law (P.L. 108-411) requires agencies to establish a training program for managers on how to manage employees whose performance is unacceptable, how to mentor and improve employee performance and how to accomplish performance appraisals. However, there is no accountability for managers to participate, and when budgets are tight, these discretionary programs are often the first to have their funding cut. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that ongoing personnel reforms require a well-trained, well-versed management team to implement and they challenge supervisors to learn new skill sets. Experience from this ongoing reform effort has shown that managers must be well trained in advance to meet the challenges of a federal pay system that is moving to “pay for performance”.

As stated above, our Coalition supports mandatory training for all supervisors within one year of the initial appointment to a supervisory position, and at least every three years thereafter to meet current and ongoing challenges. The legislation introduced by Chairman Voinovich, the Federal Workforce Performance Appraisal and Management Improvement Act, includes much of the GMC's desired program, providing for training within a year of appointment and every five years thereafter. We would like to thank Chairman Voinovich and his staff for accepting the suggestions by the GMC that the program allow supervisors to receive credits for training so they do not have to re-train upon transferring to a different job within government.

We also commend ranking member Akaka for his continued interest and action on this important issue and for including in his legislation, the Federal Supervisor Training Act, an accelerated timetable and noted authorization of funds. The GMC prefers the shorter timeframe, and we would like to offer our support of the Senators bill.

In these times of strained budgets, training is viewed as a secondary expense and is therefore the first program to meet the chopping block when Congress, the administration or an agency allocates funds. With mandatory training taking the force of law in these bills, Congress and the administration will be obligated to recognize the fundamental requirement to train the federal supervisory and management force. With OPM's new career pattern options, telecommuting, a "blended workforce," and a performance-based work environment, the workforce has become more dynamic and flexible, and training on how to utilize and appraise one's employees is increasingly essential.

Your efforts in drafting this legislation and bringing it to final passage will not achieve the results that you seek unless there is a specific authorization of funds to underwrite the cost of the mandatory training programs. Experience at some federal agencies has shown that training costs are not sustainable. Thus, we strongly urge that your bills be amended to include a section that provides for an annual authorization. We would recommend a period of five to seven years to allow for each Agency and Department to implement the mandatory supervisor training programs.

I will conclude with one final point. Our coalition is excited that Congress is taking the first steps in providing more potent tools to managers, as well as the training required to use them. One additional piece of the puzzle continues to remain missing: the assurance of a reasonable level of participation for managers and supervisors who are subjected to EEO complaints by subordinates, many of which are later found to be frivolous. As it now stands, the proliferation of EEO complaints and the complexity of the rules surrounding whistleblower reprisal cases make managers reluctant to deal effectively and quickly with poor performers and employee misconduct.

The right of an employee to file an EEO complaint or speak out against an unjust practice is very important in the federal workplace. The GMC wholly supports this right. While managers once had the right to be a part of the EEO complaint process, now they are often sidelined by agencies to the status of a mere witness with no right to see the evidence or to protect themselves during the process.

As the performance appraisal process becomes more rigorous, such as required by the Federal Workforce Performance Appraisal and Management Improvement Act, and pay decisions become dependent on those appraisals, complaints and grievances will proliferate. Therefore, we ask that Congress consider the GMC's Federal Managers Fairness Act, which would assure managers the right to participation during the EEO process, the right to be consulted before a settlement, the right to be told when a case is filed and when it is finished, and consideration for lost benefits resulting from both frivolous EEO and whistleblower complaints. Without empowering federal managers in such a way, you will find some supervisors and managers fearful of rating their employees poorly due to the possibility of retribution in the form of meritless complaints. Fairness for managers in the EEO process along with the mandatory training that is required in both bills that are the subject of this hearing will go a long way in assuring that managers have the tools and the environment to succeed as federal supervisors.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views. We would like to thank you and your staffs for including us in discussions regarding the drafts of the legislation and look forward to continuing to work with them and the Committee to produce a bill that will improve the federal workforce. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.