



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

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

before the

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

on

**“Understanding the Millennial Perspective in Deciding to Pursue and Remain in Federal
Employment”**

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September 29, 2016

Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Heitkamp, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the U.S. Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) role in helping agencies build and support the Federal workforce. As the Associate Director of Employee Services and Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) of OPM, I appreciate the opportunity to give you an overview of the efforts we are making to ensure Federal agencies have the workforce management guidance, tools, and support needed to build and sustain the talent they need to deliver on their important missions.

This Subcommittee has explored several important Federal workforce matters in a hearing and a roundtable held over the course of the past year. Last October, this Subcommittee held a hearing, titled “Improving Pay Flexibilities in the Federal Workforce,” at which OPM testified about the various compensation authorities available to agencies in recruiting and retaining an effective Federal workforce. More recently, in April of this year, this Subcommittee held a roundtable titled “Improving the USAJOBS Website,” which examined the USAJOBS website as the mechanism through which OPM enables Federal agencies to meet their statutory requirement to provide notice about available job opportunities being filled through the competitive examining process. Today’s hearing builds on themes raised in the earlier hearing and roundtable.

Statement of Mark Reinhold
Associate Director for Employee Services and Chief Human Capital Officer
U.S. Office of Personnel Management

September 29, 2016

As OPM has testified previously, each agency is responsible for strategically managing its workforce to deliver on its mission priorities and goals. This agency process includes strategic workforce planning to determine workforce needs and best align people to mission; strategic recruitment to identify sources of top talent; carrying out effective and efficient processes to hire the best talent; and attending to the needs and motivations of the workforce to create inclusive environments in which people are engaged and can excel at delivering on the mission. OPM understands that these responsibilities are varied and at times challenging, and we also recognize that the Federal system of employment is grounded in core statutory principles and ideals that, by design, make it different than many other employment sectors (e.g., providing hiring preference to veterans; ensuring fair and open competition so that every citizen who is interested in a Federal job has a fair opportunity to apply; providing protections from arbitrary action and favoritism). As such, we take continual actions to best assist and support agencies in building and sustaining the Federal workforce they need, in a way that is consistent with the core foundational precepts of our merit system of employment.

One way we support agencies is through administering the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). Through the FEVS, we are able to examine and report on key drivers of employee engagement and satisfaction with important aspects related to the work, including an employee's job, pay, their organization, and their leadership. The data collected around these points help agency leadership see where they are doing well, and where they might need to improve on creating work environments that both support and engage a high-performing workforce, and establish a positive work culture and reputation that can serve as a strength in recruiting new talent into Federal service. Following this commitment and heightened focus on employee engagement and satisfaction over the past few years, for the second year in a row the Government-wide employee engagement and global satisfaction indices have risen by one percent, breaking the prior four-year decline. Many individual agencies and components realized even larger increases in levels of employee engagement and satisfaction.

OPM is continually encouraging agencies to support diversity and inclusion in the workplace and ensure that their recruitment reaches all segments of society. As the U.S. workforce continues to experience demographic shifts, Federal agencies must continue their focus on attracting diverse talent from all segments of society, including racial and ethnic minorities, people across age groups, individuals with disabilities, and gender. The Federal Government continues to be a leader in providing employment opportunities to minorities; as of 2015, minorities represented almost 36 percent of the Federal workforce, which is greater than the percentage of minorities within the U.S. Civilian Labor Force (33 percent). The Senior Executive Service also is more diverse than ever before, with women and minorities continuing to increase in representation. And the impact of the "Millennial" generation is being reflected in the demographics of the

Statement of Mark Reinhold
Associate Director for Employee Services and Chief Human Capital Officer
U.S. Office of Personnel Management

September 29, 2016

Federal workforce, as people under 35 represented about 44 percent of new hires¹ into Federal service in FY 2015, which notably, is higher than the percentage of people under age 35 in the overall U.S. Civilian Labor Force (about 36 percent in 2015). OPM remains committed to working with Federal departments and agencies to create and maintain comprehensive strategies to drive and integrate diversity and inclusion practices, with a particular focus on areas where underrepresentation may continue to exist.

OPM also is working with agencies to examine their existing programs to raise their awareness of the flexibilities and retention tools agencies already have at their disposal. These tools can come in the form of streamlined hiring authorities, compensation flexibilities for recruitment and retention, workplace flexibilities like telework and alternative work schedules, educational and development opportunities, and the development of clear, focused career paths for each employee. By engaging with employees in career development planning, agencies can benefit both their organizations and their employees by aligning employee career paths with agency missions. OPM and agencies are seeking to maximize opportunities for employees to grow and develop, whether through mentoring and coaching, the development of common training programs for areas of frequent need, or through rotational opportunities like the President's Management Council's Interagency Rotation Program that is run by OPM.

Through our own data analysis, partnership with agencies and stakeholders, and visibility into the overall human capital landscape, OPM continually works to advance sound policy solutions and encourage agency operational enhancements to address challenges within the parameters of the law. For example, to address challenges in the areas of recruiting and hiring, OPM, in partnership with OMB and the Presidential Personnel Office, has launched a Hiring Excellence Campaign as part of the President's Management Agenda. The Hiring Excellence Campaign enables OPM to reach Federal hiring managers and human resources professionals in headquarters and field locations nationwide. Through the Hiring Excellence Campaign, human resources staff and hiring managers are brought into better communication and collaboration in order to improve the hiring process and hiring outcomes. The Hiring Excellence Campaign, designed using extensive agency feedback and delivered to agency partners across Government, hits key areas in the hiring process where it is essential that hiring managers and human resources specialists collaborate.

Some of these key inflection points are: the upfront planning before a hiring need is identified through workforce, succession, and staff acquisition planning; the recruitment strategy that identifies the sources for recruitment, taking into account the skills required for the position, the skills on hand, and the skills gaps and imbalances; identifying and validating critical duties,

¹ Source: EHRI Statistical Data Mart - Includes civilian non-seasonal full time permanent appointments.

Statement of Mark Reinhold
Associate Director for Employee Services and Chief Human Capital Officer
U.S. Office of Personnel Management

September 29, 2016

responsibilities, and competencies for the position and collaborating to determine the best way to assess these competencies in potential candidates; working together to develop a strong job opportunity announcement that attracts applicants to apply for a position; promote and discuss the strategic use of appropriate hiring authorities and flexibilities available to agencies when seeking candidates; and evaluating and selecting the best candidates as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The Hiring Excellence Campaign provides a variety of tools and resources for agency reference (www.opm.gov/hiringexcellence), such as a Hiring Toolkit, a set of mythbusters to debunk commonly held misconceptions about aspects of the hiring process, information about various hiring flexibilities, supplemental online training, and other guidance for both hiring managers and human resources professionals. To date, OPM has conducted 32 workshops across the nation; in-person workshops having been conducted from coast-to-coast, and virtual presentations are expanding on this reach. So far, the Hiring Excellence campaign has reached nearly 1,200 hiring managers and human resources professionals from over 25 agencies sharing best practices, tips, and techniques for improving Federal hiring. In addition, hiring excellence was the theme of OPM's recent Government-wide virtual Human Resources Conference, which drew more than 1,500 participants and enabled us to provide useful tools and information and further spread the word about the importance of human resources specialists and hiring managers working together to connect with the top talent we need across the Government.

OPM also recognizes that there are times when changes to existing systems are necessary in order to improve the hiring experience for both agencies and applicants. This is reflected in our recent work to enhance the USAJOBS website for the benefit of both the applicant and agencies. In 2015, jobseekers used USAJOBS to complete more than 1 billion job searches, and filed more than 22 million applications for agency job openings. Our progress in enhancing this website is yielding real dividends for jobseekers and agencies. On the hiring manager and human resources staff end, USAJOBS now has an Agency Talent Portal that provides tools to help agencies find and recruit talent. On the applicant side, USAJOBS offers a geographic map search feature to help job seekers locate jobs around the world in which they may be interested. OPM also updated the application process to help applicants work through a simple, five-step tracker to create an application package. In addition, a new "Profile Dashboard" now makes it easier for applicants to upload key documents, manage their preferences and save job searches, and monitor the status of applications as agencies provide updates. Our enhancements thus far are showing steady increases in user satisfaction, increasing from 72 percent to an all-time high of 79 percent over the past year, as well as significant improvements in other key areas such as a 24 percent reduction in help desk requests.

Statement of Mark Reinhold
Associate Director for Employee Services and Chief Human Capital Officer
U.S. Office of Personnel Management

September 29, 2016

We have also recently released a study on the progress of the Pathways Programs for Students and Recent Graduates that shows diversity has increased compared to pre-Pathways programs.² These programs recently celebrated their fourth anniversary and provide an opportunity for students and recent graduates to chart a career path in Federal service. Research tells us that students and recent graduates about to enter the workforce believe in public service and want to make a difference. The Federal Government needs to harness that innovative spirit and commitment to service, and that is exactly what our Student Internship and Recent Graduates Pathways Programs continue to do. With more Federal employees becoming eligible for retirement, these Pathways Programs, including the Presidential Management Fellows program, have become a great resource for agencies to help bolster our civil service ranks. Our data show that 35,364 Federal employees had been hired through the Pathways Programs by the end of Fiscal Year 2015, and 93 percent of those Pathways Programs participants who responded in a recent study OPM conducted either plan to remain at their current agencies or want to stay with the Federal Government in the immediate future.

Through the examples outlined above, as well as through the work OPM does every day, we are working diligently to assist the Federal Government in recruiting and retaining a workforce that is drawn from the American public it serves and fulfills the commitment each agency holds. Thank you again for having me here today, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

² <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/students-recent-graduates/reference-materials/report-on-special-study-of-the-pathways-programs.pdf>