



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

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June 14, 2018

Secretary Betsy DeVos
U.S. Department of Education
Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) Department of Education Building
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Secretary DeVos,

AFGE strongly objects to the Department of Education's proposal to drastically and unjustifiably cut telework. This decision from the agency is another in a long line of your decisions that are anti-employee and seem designed to drive away dedicated, productive employees who work hard to carry out the agency's mission.

For example, the agency's proposal does not address how people will be physically accommodated in offices when the Department has spent the last few years eliminating office space and parking at its offices. It is not discernable to the union about how the agency will accommodate an influx of employees into its current office space. How does the agency intend to accommodate all agency employees in a workspace that is not large enough to accommodate them?

Moreover, the office space design implemented by the agency since implementing widespread telework is incompatible in its design and layout with a productive work environment. Since the agency has made the office work space into open cubicles, it has eliminated privacy and employee's ability to concentrate on his or her work. Many employees use the phone to speak to the public and, with no sound barriers, those conversations will disturb co-workers both in their own phone conversations and/or in their ability to concentrate on completing work assignments. How does the agency intend to address these issues?


Beyond the bare assertion in the agency's telework rescission notice that cutting telework is allegedly designed to improve productivity, the agency has not offered any actual evidence that substantiates this claim. In fact, the severe cutting of telework will result in LESS productivity among the Department of Education workforce. For example, the agency has invested significant amounts of taxpayer dollars in teleconferencing, Skype, and other similar technologies to facilitate telework that will now go to waste. The agency will have to expend additional funds upgrading networks and equipment such as desks and other office supplies to

accommodate employees working primarily in an office. Finally, the agency will need to rent or otherwise obtain additional office space in most locations.

There is also a negative cost from the loss of work schedule flexibility. Employees will need to take more leave to attend to person matters that they are now able to schedule on regular days off for those who have been on compressed schedules. The loss of flexibility provided by the use of compressed work tours and telework will negatively impact employee morale and will make it more difficult for the agency to recruit and retain well-qualified employees. These cuts mostly eliminate the work/life balance that flexible work schedules and telework allow employees to currently enjoy. The agency has shown no justification for raising the stress of employees and thereby severely harming employee morale.

Many employees have reported to the union that the agency's proposed telework and compressed schedule cuts are leading them and many of their co-workers to begin searching for employment outside the agency. Long commutes, traffic, and the loss of work/life balance that these cuts would lead to make working at the Department of Education unappealing and toxic. Many employees also expressed that it seems as though the agency is doling out punishment by making these cuts. Many managers at all level also utilize compressed work schedules and telework. Will supervisor and managers also lose these benefits or will these just be imposed on front line employees?

In addition to this letter, AFGE is submitting a demand to bargain over the agency's proposed implementation of cuts to telework and compressed work schedules. AFGE is available to meet to conduct this bargaining at reasonable times and places so that employee concerns may be addressed.

Sincerely,

Cathie McQuiston
Deputy General Counsel
AFGE, AFL-CIO

cc: Jared Smith, Acting Chief, Labor Relations Branch
Samantha Cutler, Director, Workforce Relations Division
Jennifer C. Arguello, Deputy Director Workforce Relations Division/Chief Negotiator