

GOVERNMENT MANAGERS COALITION

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August 25, 2021

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
Counselor to the President
Coordinator of the COVID-19 Response
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Hon. Kiran Ahuja
Director
Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Hon. Robin Carnahan
Administrator
General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006

RE: Government Managers Coalition Letter to Safer Federal Workforce Task Force

Dear Mr. Zients, Director Ahuja, Administrator Carnahan:

The Government Managers Coalition (GMC) consists of the five major federal-sector executive and management professional associations. Collectively, we represent more than 250,000 of the federal government's most dedicated career executives and managers. Our members oversee processing of over 240 million federal tax returns, ensure 64 million Americans receive their Social Security checks each month, safely handle over 16 million flights annually, and far more. The GMC advocates for policies and practices that reflect commonly-held beliefs within the federal executive and manager community, particularly regarding the development and implementation of policies impacting good governance and the federal workforce.

We write you today to specifically address the unique needs and requirements of federal supervisors, managers, and executives as they lead their organizations through the COVID-19 pandemic and shifting policy priorities of the Congress and President. To date, these unique needs have received scant attention from OPM, OMB, and the White House via resources, guidance, directives, training and support. Failure by the Administration to ensure agencies are properly equipping and empowering federal leaders to implement and execute the guidance and directives coming from the Administration undermines its own objectives and priorities.

Further, it is likely that without proper guidance and clear lines of communication, our members will ultimately bear the brunt of challenges and be subject to personal legal risk. It is critical we avoid this outcome to maintain morale and ensure that the American public receive the most from its civil servants.

Some agencies at the component level are doing a good job of engaging our organizations and supporting their management cadre; however, the GMC believes that the Biden-Harris Administration must do more to prioritize and focus on the needs of all federal employees. It is critical that the Administration engage with all stakeholders, but most importantly the federal managers who are responsible for overseeing and implementing the President's Executive Orders

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on a daily basis. We urge the Administration to remind agencies to honor, and pursue new, Part 251 agreements with federal management and employee associations, as last occurred in April 2016¹.

Due to staffing and safety requirements of COVID-19, many of our members have spent the past 18 months performing duties far outside the scope of their typical employment – and often far below their grade level. With staff unable to enter the workplace, some managers are devoting 10-12 hour work days where they must perform clerical duties such as opening mail and scanning documents. This is in addition to the management jobs they are still expected to perform, because other employees are unable or unwilling to enter the workspace. Managers are working overtime and on weekends to try and help their organizations and the Administration keep up. Consequently, we are observing managers voluntarily downgrading their positions, returning to bargaining-unit eligible line roles or simply putting in paperwork for retirement and in some cases disability. Furthermore, we are seeing many employees unwilling to step up and apply for management positions. We are very concerned with these developments and believe the Administration should monitor them closely and develop a plan for action.

Beyond these practical realities, our members have more foundational questions/issues that we wish to bring to your attention.

- Our members are extremely concerned about the financial reality of COVID-19 testing. Agencies were not appropriated funds for this purpose, and it is very likely the government will be in a Continuing Resolution for months into the new fiscal year.
- Agencies often interpret OPM guidance in different ways, as each organization views the guidance through different organizational structures and programmatic lenses and lexicons. This is confusing and problematic for our members who lack central, authoritative guidance.
 - For example, despite the clear guidance from the Administration to agencies to use the CDC transmission tracker to guide local safety protocols, the IRS created their own IRS Transmission Report, which is only updated weekly, because the Service concluded that the CDC tracker was updated too frequently and too burdensome to monitor.
- Site managers are not trained nor equipped to develop and implement a rigorous healthcare screening protocol. Such a task, in addition to their day-to-day activities and increased hours worked during the pandemic, will undoubtedly lead to inefficiencies in their core responsibilities, as well as an inadequate screening protocol.
- Managers are likely to face employment disputes enforcing COVID-19 protocols, especially as the Administration strengthens potential disciplinary consequences to employees. How will agencies protect and support these managers? Absent a functioning Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) to uphold their employment rights, managers are extremely at risk. Managers are left choosing accountability for a worker who is disregarding the rules or having sufficient staffing to perform the central duties they are tasked with. Such tasks range in scope and detail, but all are as crucial to public safety

¹ <https://www.chcoc.gov/content/relationships-management-organizations-0>

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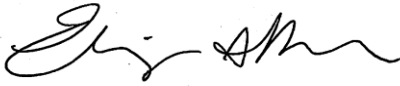
and public health as maintaining a nuclear reactor. We need a clear, authoritative, single-source message that is crystal clear and available for managers to use.

- What are OPM and the Task Force doing to ensure agencies are complying with the guidance issued to date?
 - For example, the IRS does not have a contact tracing program, even as nearly half of all IRS workers who contracted COVID-19 were in an IRS building during the timeframe they would be contagious. This TIGTA [report](#) for IRS showed critical lapses such as only one facility had disinfecting wipes clearly visible near shared equipment and there were routine violations of masking and distancing guidance in each facility reviewed.

We understand this is a challenging time, and we face difficult circumstances. We would like to meet to discuss these issues, and how the GMC, the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force and the Biden-Harris Administration can work together to support our critical federal leadership cadre.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our views and concerns and we look forward to meeting with you in the very near future.

Sincerely,



ELIZABETH BARCUS
President
FAA Managers Association



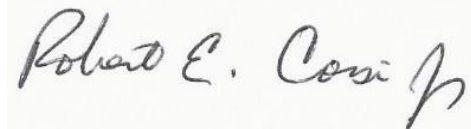
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