



April 22, 2021

**VIA EMAIL**

The Honorable Blake Paulson  
Acting Comptroller of the Currency  
400 7th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20219

Dear Acting Comptroller Paulson:

This week, I learned of events that have me very concerned about the protection of the health and safety of employees at the OCC represented by NTEU. First, NTEU found out – from other employees, not from OCC management – that employees attending the Bank Supervision School in Dallas during the week of April 5 had been exposed to COVID-19. This situation raises a number of red flags:

- The training should not have been conducted in-person. The OCC's Bank Supervision School does not meet the standard of "mission-critical" work that requires travel, as set forth in the U.S. Department of the Treasury policy (COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan) and OMB guidance (OMB M-20-14). No other FIRREA agency is conducting such training in person, and OCC is conducting all other training virtually.
- Employees were not clearly informed that attendance was not mandatory, and employees were not given an option to attend virtually;
- Employees were not instructed to get tested prior to travel, in accordance with CDC guidelines;
- Employees were not instructed that if they received a positive test, or if they were still awaiting test results, that they should not travel, in accordance with CDC guidelines;
- Although employees were apparently instructed to wear masks, the instructions indicated that masks were not required for the instructor or for participants while talking. The CDC guidelines and Executive Order issued by President Biden contain no such exceptions;
- Affected employees were not clearly advised to self-quarantine after exposure, as required by CDC and Treasury guidelines, and were not clearly told that they would continue to receive lodging and per diem while quarantining in Dallas.

Even following this exposure at the training session in Dallas, NTEU learned this week that the OCC is proceeding with plans to conduct another training session next week in Washington, D.C. NTEU strongly objects to the holding of this event in-person and has

requested that it be rescheduled to take place virtually. The CDC currently lists the level of community transmission of the virus in Washington, D.C. as "High." Furthermore, the OMB guidance specifically provides that "[t]ravel by a federal employee to or within areas where there is community spread of COVID-19 should only be undertaken when there is an urgent need, such as to protect life and property."

I have just received word that the OCC has denied our request and is proceeding with the in-person training next week. Although staff development for bank supervision activities may be important, it is not "mission critical" that this training be conducted in-person. Even if employees are given a "choice" as to whether or not to attend (and it is not clear that they have been given such a choice, based on the training announcement), you should understand that employees may feel pressured to attend. I therefore ask that you reconsider and that this training be rescheduled to occur virtually,

I also urge you to cancel any other in-person training or meetings, and to seek an alternative to the on-site Uniform Commissioning Exam (UCE).

I know that these are unprecedented times, and I understand that the pandemic poses challenges in fulfilling the important mission of the OCC. This need to fulfill the mission should not, however, come at the expense of putting the health and safety of OCC employees at risk. Unfortunately, the scheduling of the Bank Supervision School as an in-person sessions seems to fit a pattern where the OCC has been lax about employee health and safety when it comes to COVID safety protocols recommended by the CDC and public health experts. The OCC did not require masks in the workplace until the Executive Order issued by President Biden required it. Further, the agency has opened its offices much more so than the other financial regulatory agencies.

Although many people are now receiving vaccinations, the crisis is not over. Infection rates remain high in many areas, so the risk to employees continues. I urge you to encourage your staff to work with NTEU to help implement policies to fully protect the health and safety of OCC employees, and to provide employees with clear information and explanations for its policies and actions during this crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony M. Reardon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "A" and "R".

Anthony M. Reardon  
National President