



May 1, 2020

**VIA E-MAIL**

The Honorable Alexander M. Azar II  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

As federal employees anticipate being recalled to their buildings and offices, the employees represented by the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have expressed a significant amount of anxiety and fear about their ability to return to work safely. Their fears are understandable, as more than 1 million Americans are infected with COVID-19 (one-third of the global total) and more than 60,000 U.S. residents have died from this virus.

In order to prepare for the potential resumption of agency operations, I request that a briefing be scheduled with NTEU as soon as possible to answer employees' many questions and concerns regarding the continuing threat from the COVID-19 pandemic and what precautions the agency will be taking to ensure their safety in this current environment. We would also like to discuss recommendations NTEU has developed to ensure a safe return that acknowledges the challenges that returning to the office poses to employees.

At the outset, we would like to emphasize that where state and local leaders have determined that stay-at-home orders remain necessary to protect the safety of citizens and to reduce the transmission of the virus, employees should be allowed to comply with those orders where possible. NTEU requests this briefing so that NTEU and HHS can work together to ensure the safe return of employees to work and prepare for a smooth and successful resumption of on-site operations.

During this briefing, we would like to discuss the following measures, among others, to protect employee safety at any locations where on-site operations may resume:

- COVID-19 testing for all employees;
- Screening employees, including taking temperatures;
- Cleaning and disinfecting all workspaces and common;

The Honorable Alexander M. Azar II

May 1, 2020

Page Two

- Safe physical distancing;
- Ample supplies of hand-sanitizer, wipes, and gloves;
- Wearing masks/cloth face coverings in the workplace;
- Maximizing telework, particularly for employees with children whose schools or child-care facilities are closed; and
- Telework or weather and safety leave for “high risk” employees.

HHS employees already face many challenges in the course of their work and concerns about their health and safety while returning to shared office spaces should not be one of them. I know you share that interest.

To arrange this briefing, NTEU’s point of contact is Kate Sylvester, National Negotiator, at [kate.sylvester@nteu.org](mailto:kate.sylvester@nteu.org). I appreciate your cooperation on this. Please do not hesitate to reach out directly to me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony M. Reardon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Anthony M. Reardon  
National President

cc: Blanca Sanchez, HHS Director of National Labor Relations  
Ken Moffett, NTEU Director of Negotiations  
Frank Barczykowski, NTEU Deputy Director of Negotiations  
Kate Sylvester, NTEU National Negotiator