



July 15, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND FIRST-CLASS MAIL

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

Dear Secretary Azar,

I write to strongly urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to reconsider severely curtailing telework in light of feedback from your employees.

The National Treasury Employees Union recently surveyed more than 1,600 bargaining unit employees across HHS operating divisions. The results show the harmful and irreversible implications of telework cuts on your employees, your agency and its public health mission. As you continue fast-tracking changes to nearly eliminate this long-standing practice, and many others, it's imperative that you hear about the impact of your actions straight from your employees. Of the employees surveyed:

- Five out of six said reducing or eliminating telework would be a factor in deciding to leave HHS.
- More than half said that reducing or eliminating telework would result in increased time and cost of commuting, reduced productivity and an insufficient number of work stations.
- 54 percent of respondents have been teleworking for at least five years with some more than 10 years.

Your employees also shared, in their own words, the personal impact of telework cuts. They made it very clear how critically important the program is to their productivity, quality of life and decision to stay with HHS. Here is a small sampling of what they said:

- "Telework has made me much more productive. If this goes away, so will I."
- "In the modern world and with so many smarter options now available, why is this even a discussion? We're going backwards, period."
- "If telework and alternative schedules are eliminated or curtailed, I will immediately begin looking for other jobs. Not having to spend hours and thousands of dollars in gas yearly has made working at HHS an option."

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- “A lot of colleagues work from different states and they will leave the job if they have to relocate their families here.”
- “This will create burnout with an already nearly unmanageable workload.”

These are just five of more than 750 written responses from employees who told us how important telework is to their personal and professional lives. For years, HHS employees have operated under a contract that they built their lives around, providing them the right to work-life balance as they served their country by keeping food and medicine safe and supporting our nation’s health care system.

If management continues moving to cut telework, HHS and the FDA will lose some of our most valued and experienced civil servants—and this is not something the agency and taxpayers can afford to happen. If we lose these dedicated employees, the harm of these policies will extend far beyond the employees to the public they work to protect.

Telework is a smart, progressive program that is good for HHS, employees and taxpayers. For employees, telework offers more flexibility, improves morale, saves on commuting costs and reduces traffic and pollution. For HHS, it reduces expensive office space and improves employee productivity and retention, all of which save taxpayer money.

I hope you will reconsider changes that harm this important program. In addition, I reiterate my earlier requests to meet with you and work together to return the HHS bargaining team to the table with a good faith effort to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement. That will move us closer to creating a workplace that benefits the agency, your employees and the taxpayers we serve.

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