

HHS UPDATE

NTEU National Treasury Employees Union

HHS Cuts Lines of COVID-19 Communications

Not surprisingly, HHS refuses to communicate directly with NTEU on COVID-19 issues, even as the union continues to engage in regular briefings with other agencies where we represent employees. HHS has formed coronavirus response teams and holds all-hands meetings, but has not invited NTEU to participate.

Chapter leaders have informed NTEU that HHS is not granting additional flexibilities for work schedules and leave on a department-wide basis. HHS released guidance but it is largely the same as the general guidance from the Office of Personnel Management instructing OpDivs to consider granting flexibilities on a case-by-case basis. NTEU continues to advocate for increased leave and work flexibilities in each individual OpDiv.

While most HHS employees across OpDivs have been on full-time telework, NTEU is monitoring health and safety issues for employees required to report to offices. In buildings where employees or their immediate family members test positive for COVID-19, NTEU is ensuring management adheres to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on disinfecting compromised areas.

SAMHSA Backs Off 'Plan' to Reopen Building in May

Earlier this month, SAMHSA employees working in Rockville, Md., received messages from supervisors claiming the agency planned to reopen the Parklawn building in early May. The brief emails were sent without any mention of plans to protect employee health and safety if they return to the office. Many employees were understandably anxious and angry about the message, and NTEU immediately took action. After NTEU voiced strong objections to the plan in an email to Chief of Staff Deepa Avula, she replied that SAMHSA has not set an official return-to-work date and she was unaware of the supervisors' emails. NTEU continues to monitor the situation at SAMHSA and other HHS OpDivs to ensure every necessary measure is taken to address employee health and safety concerns before offices are reopened.

Business as Usual

NTEU Fights Assaults on Your Rights

Along with NTEU's work on COVID-19 issues, the union remains engaged in aggressive efforts to protect your workplace rights. Here are some updates:

- NTEU's fight for a fair contract continues after the union's latest arbitration victory reinforcing our position that HHS had no legal right to impose contract terms before bargaining was complete over a successor agreement. NTEU is scheduling a hearing with HHS and an arbitrator to reach agreement on a remedy for employees harmed by HHS' illegal actions.
- NTEU filed a grievance opposing HHS' decision to unilaterally reorganize the **Administration for Community Living** and force about 20 bargaining unit employees from around the country to move to Washington, D.C. An arbitrator agreed that HHS violated the contract and ordered the parties to conduct a hearing to decide on a remedy. NTEU will advocate for giving affected employees the option to move back home, at the agency's expense, and to telework full-time.
This is an important victory for all HHS employees. Each time management has moved to reorganize departments without bargaining with NTEU, the union has answered back with a grievance. NTEU's persistence has helped stopped HHS from unilaterally implementing more reorganizations.
- NTEU is challenging unilateral changes HHS made to the Annual Awards Program in the **Administration for Children and Families** (ACF). These changes violate the 2010/2014 consolidated contract, which remains in effect until NTEU and HHS complete negotiations over a new agreement. ACF is moving to change the fixed amount award despite the negotiated article specifying the percent of salary employees may receive as a performance-based award. NTEU will continue working to make sure deserving ACF employees get award money they are due.
- NTEU continues to go to bat for individual employees. A manager denied a request from a Consumer Safety Officer and member of Chapter 254 (**FDA** Kansas City) for recurring five-day telework. For years, the CSO had five-day episodic telework and reported his inspectional work to another office in a different state. The supervisor made the CSO ask permission to telework every week, and every week he granted the request. The denial for recurring telework was not only unreasonable, but it was a contract violation. An arbitrator agreed with NTEU and ordered the agency to grant the CSO the recurring telework schedule he requested.

"...to ensure that every federal employee is treated with dignity and respect."