

HHS UPDATE

NTEU National Treasury Employees Union

Stimulus Bill Includes Aid for Federal Employees, FDA Funding Boost

The American Rescue Plan, which President Biden signed yesterday, includes NTEU-supported language to assist federal employees by providing emergency paid leave for pandemic-related issues.

The bill gives federal employees up to 15 weeks of emergency leave if they are unable to work for reasons related to the pandemic. The paid leave can be used for those who have contracted COVID-19 or are required to quarantine because of possible exposure. It can also be used if their normal child care provider is unavailable for COVID-19-related reasons, or time off for obtaining the vaccine. This benefit is capped at \$1,400 per week and expires on Sept. 30.

NTEU supported this language throughout the process and successfully worked to build opposition to efforts to strip the provisions out of the legislation.

The new law also ensures workers' compensation eligibility for federal employees diagnosed with COVID-19 whose duties require contact with others or other risks of exposure to the virus.

Another NTEU-backed provision provides the Food and Drug Administration with \$500 million in additional funding for its work on vaccines and other pandemic-related responsibilities.

The Future of Telework

With the ever-growing number of Americans being vaccinated and talk of workplaces reopening, you may be wondering when FDA and HHS employees will be told to "return to work" and, along with that, what your telework options will be. Although we have had no discussions with the agency about "reopening," telework is directly linked to the executive order issued by President Biden a month ago.

Under that order, any contract provisions or bargaining proposals that implement the provisions of the 2018 EOs must be immediately set aside and renegotiated in good faith. That includes HHS' illegal implementation (as already deemed by an arbitrator) of a impasse panel's order allowing HHS to limit telework to one day per week. That panel has now resigned, at President Biden's request.

Since President's Biden order, NTEU has written not [one](#)—but [two](#)—letters to Acting Secretary Norris Cochran urging him to comply with the order, restore the terms of our

2010 contract (including telework) and a negotiate a new contract in good faith.

Acting Secretary Cochran's response: crickets.

He may be in that chair temporarily but that is no excuse for not displaying the leadership the position requires. We need to take the first step toward repairing the labor-management relationship and silence doesn't get us there.

Be assured that this is not the last of the steps NTEU will be taking to get HHS back to the table. Acting Secretary Cochran must immediately comply with the executive order and the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) [guidance](#) implementing it.

When HHS complies, as they must, one of NTEU's top priorities will be to bargain an expanded telework program that reflects what HHS employees across Op-Divs have proven throughout the pandemic; you don't need to be in an office to successfully accomplish your agency missions.

As the last few years have demonstrated, NTEU will not yield in our ongoing fight for your rights.