



July 21, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy and Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents 150,000 federal employees across 33 agencies, I urge you to include provisions to assist federal workers in the next coronavirus relief bill. Throughout this crisis, NTEU's number one priority has been the health and safety of our federal employees. And as federal agencies continue to call employees back to their buildings and offices, many employees have expressed a significant amount of anxiety and fear about their ability to return to work safely. Their fears are understandable, as more than 3.7 million Americans have been infected with COVID-19 and more than 140,000 U.S. residents have already died from this virus.

NTEU applauds agencies use of maximum telework, especially in light of efforts in the past few years to reduce the practice across the federal government, since many federal worksites are not conducive to social distancing and lack the protective equipment, cleaning supplies and other safety measures that are needed to ensure employees are safe. This global pandemic underscores the value of strong telework programs in providing continuity of operations while slowing community spread. However, employees who are required to report to their worksites and interact with the public are at greater risk of exposure to the virus, such as CBP personnel at the ports of entry. Unfortunately, many agencies are failing to ensure increased worksite cleaning and provide adequate personal protective equipment in addition to denying hazardous duty pay and are forcing employees into situations where they have to seek alternative child and dependent care, often at great expense, given the closure of schools and other programs to assist in family care.

Although NTEU is working with agencies to ensure a safe return to the worksite, legislation is needed to ensure agencies are taking the necessary steps to safeguard employees

until an effective vaccine is made available. NTEU applauds the House for passing another coronavirus legislative relief package in May that includes NTEU-backed provisions supporting and protecting federal employees during the pandemic. The Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act, H.R. 6800, includes several NTEU-supported provisions, including:

- Creating a COVID-19 Heroes Fund that would provide federal employees with additional premium pay of \$13 per hour, up to a maximum \$10,000 for those whose basic pay is less than \$200,000, for either those who have regular or routine contact with the public or those who must report to a worksite where social distancing is not possible and other preventative measures are not available.
- Continued telework for all eligible federal employees throughout the pandemic, plus incentives for agencies to expand their telework programs.
- Allowing federal first responders to stay in their current law enforcement retirement plans even if they are unable to meet the physical requirements of their position due to exposure to coronavirus and are moved to other civil service jobs.
- A presumption that federal employees who work with the public and are diagnosed with COVID-19 contracted it in the workplace, for workers' compensation purposes.
- Eliminating out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 treatment under the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program.
- Extending the emergency leave provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act to all federal employees.

Legislation is also needed to ensure weather and safety leave to all employees who are not able to perform their duties remotely and who cannot travel to their duty station because of health and safety risks as a result of the coronavirus crisis and to authorize the use of weather and safety leave to cover childcare and other dependent care responsibilities arising as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. NTEU supports Representative Connolly's bills, H.R. 7340 and H.R. 7341, that includes many of these provisions that would support federal employees and help ensure their safety as they continue to work through this crisis.

In addition, NTEU urges Congress to act to extend the limit on the amount of annual leave federal employees are allowed to carry over due to the inability to take annual leave during the pandemic. Under current law, carry over hours are limited to 240. Many federal employees have cancelled their scheduled vacations this year due to pandemic related inability to travel, destination shutdowns, stay at home orders and required quarantines. We believe the earned annual leave of employees who are unable to take leave as they continue the important work of government and adhere to stay at home orders should be protected beyond the 240-hour limit. NTEU supports Representative Wexton's amendment to H.R. 6395 that ensures that federal employees serving during the pandemic can carry over unused annual leave.

As Congress continues negotiations on legislation to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that you include these provisions supporting federal workers, many of whom are on the frontlines and bear a significant share of the burden in responding to this crisis. I know we all understand federal workers' anxiety about their own safety during this pandemic as they work to provide essential government services. Therefore, it is important that we

continue to work together to do everything we can to mitigate the risks they face and provide them with the flexibility and the resources needed to protect them, their families, and their colleagues. We deeply appreciate your efforts to support and protect federal employees throughout this crisis and encourage you to continue to help ensure the safety of all federal employees in this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

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

Anthony M. Reardon
National President