

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 6, 2012

Dear Acting Director Zients,

We write to raise an urgent matter regarding the longstanding backlog of federal employees waiting an inordinate amount of time before receiving the full retirement-related benefits they have earned. We know you share our commitment to ensuring that the men and women who have served our nation for decades are treated fairly and respectfully, and we ask for your assistance in resolving this matter.

Over the last year, a significant number of frustrated federal employees have contacted us to report inordinate processing delays with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Virginia and Maryland are home to more than 250,000 federal retirees. After looking into this issue, we were deeply concerned to learn that this appears to be a vast, ongoing and systemic problem. Federal employees across the country routinely experience significant delays in obtaining their earned benefits. On February 1, 2012, the Senate Homeland Security and Government Accountability Committee held a hearing to investigate the unacceptably high level of retirees who have waited one year or more before receiving their full monthly annuity payments.

Frankly, the current situation is unacceptable. More than 60,000 federal employees are currently waiting for OPM to process their paperwork so that they can obtain the benefits they have earned. All of us should be aware of the demographic factors that will trigger a coming wave of additional federal retirements, yet OPM continues to rely on paper records and an inadequate number of adjudicators. For these reasons, we ask you to:

1. Require OPM to submit a report with a list of agencies that have not submitted accurate or complete personnel documents to OPM containing the data required to process retirement claims. I believe this report should include a breakdown of outstanding requests from OPM, by agency, and I would request that this report be submitted to Congress within 90 days;
2. Require OPM to submit monthly updates to Congress that detail the progress made in completing the backlogged number of outstanding retirement, disability, court-ordered and lump sum death benefit claims. This monthly report should include the date that OPM initially received the claim, by month and year;
3. Instruct OPM and human resource personnel across the federal government to prepare and promote a standardized checklist of information and documentation required of prospective retirees twelve, six, and three months before their expected retirement date;
4. Instruct OPM managers to work with OMB to prioritize implementation of a longer-term, commercially-available technology for management of retiree records in the FY 2014

Budget. OPM has expended considerable taxpayer resources in a series of unsuccessful IT contracts over the past two decades. It should be clear that we cannot solve the long-term concern about processing retiree benefits without incorporating technology to automate data feeds from other federal agencies, to standardize forms used to convey information about retirees, and to speed other basic functions which will improve the intake and processing of interim and final benefits due to retirees; and

5. Implement the detailed recommendations provided by the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, attached.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We intend to continue to monitor OPM's progress in resolving this backlog of retirement claims, and we are committed to ensure the agency has adequate resources and rational procedures in place going forward. We appreciate the Administration's past dedication to government efficiency, and hope that you will be a partner in making sure that these hard-working retirees receive their benefits in a timely manner. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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Mark Warner  
U.S. Senator



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Barbara Mikulski  
U.S. Senator



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Ben Cardin  
U.S. Senator

CC: Jacob Lew