



CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

BY

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

BEFORE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

HOUSE OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE

ON

OFFICIAL TIME WITHIN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

MAY 24, 2018

Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Subcommittee on Government Operations of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, on behalf of the more than 700,000 federal and District of Columbia government employees represented by the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE), we submit this statement for the record of the Subcommittee's May 24, 2018 hearing concerning official time within the federal government.

We must begin by correcting a fundamental misconception. Official time is not "union time." It is representational time. It is time spent representing workers who are the victims of illegal discrimination, illegal harassment, or other prohibited personnel practices. It is time spent exposing fraud, waste, or abuse, or threats to public health; and also working with the whistleblowers who bring these problems into the light. Official time is time spent serving the public interest in efficient and open government.

Official time is **not** used nor is it permitted for any internal union business, such as for:

- soliciting union membership;
- attending internal union meetings;
- campaigning for union office;
- electing union officers; or
- collecting dues, which in the federal sector are 100% voluntary in the first instance.

Official time provides federal workers a voice at the worksite and ensures that all members of a bargaining unit receive the same benefit of a fair collective bargaining agreement regardless of their union membership status. It also promotes an apolitical, impartial civil service that helps ensure agencies remain accountable to the People and that they are not able to conduct the business of government in the shadows.

Official Time Makes the Government More Efficient and More Effective

Through the use of official time, volunteer representatives are able to work together with federal managers to use their time, talent, and resources to make our government even better. Gains in quality, productivity, and efficiency--year after year, in department after department--simply would not have been possible without the reasonable and sound use of official time.

Workplace problems that would otherwise escalate into costly litigation are dealt with promptly and more informally through the use of official time. Official time under labor-management partnerships or forums is used to bring closure to workplace disputes between the agency and an employee or group of employees. Those disputes would otherwise be funneled to far more expensive, more formal and adversarial procedures – such as to complaints before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, appeals before the Merit Systems Protection Board, and costly federal court litigation.

Healthier Labor-Management Relations in the Federal Government Also Produce Cost Savings in Reduced Administrative Expenses

Official time reduces employee turnover, improves customer service, prevents costly litigation, and leads to quicker and more efficient implementation of agency initiatives. Employee representatives use official time for joint labor-management activities that address operational, mission-enabling issues in the agencies. Official time is allowed for activities such as designing and delivering joint training of employees on work-related subjects and introduction of new programs and work processes. Often, management initiates the use of official time to help improve agency productivity.

Conclusion

The American public must remember who federal employees are and what they do. Federal employees provide critical taxpayer services. Federal employees are nurses and doctors caring for our soldiers, veterans and their families. Federal employees inspect our food and ensure our meat and poultry are safe. Federal employees are Police Officers who protect our communities and federal buildings. Federal employees are Correctional Officers who protect the public from some of the most dangerous prison inmates in the country. Federal employees are Fire Fighters. Federal employees are Border Patrol Agents who keep America safe by protecting our borders and stopping drug smugglers. Federal employees are researchers who find cures for diseases. Federal employees are scientists who keep our air and water clean. Federal employees are mechanics and technicians who work around the world with our military ensuring national security.

The important services that these federal employees provide the American public are evidence that there is too much at stake to weaken or eliminate the current system of structured communication and collaboration between federal employees and management. Official time allows federal employees to focus on doing their jobs by giving them a voice to address workplace failure and injustices and providing them a representative against unjust and unwarranted actions.

Official time is a tool that provides specific parameters within which agency management and employees must work together to maintain a productive work environment to provide timely, quality services to taxpayers. Official time gives management an organized, agency-wide system to help assess workplace strengths and areas in need of improvement, and thus, utilize agency resources in the most efficient manner.

AFGE strongly opposes any proposal that would erode workers' rights by restricting official, representational time.