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Coronavirus Telework Talking Points

- After repeated calls from AFGE, the administration finally took action and issued a direct call for all agencies to maximize telework across the nation and to ensure steps are in place to restrict access to federal facilities.
- Unfortunately, as has been the case from the beginning of this crisis, agencies' implementation of this directive has been haphazard and inconsistent.
- We are still hearing reports from agencies like SSA, VA, and USCIS of high-risk employees who should be teleworking or on weather and safety leave who are being forced to come into offices to perform non-essential tasks.
- We are hearing reports from other agencies where employees were sent home on telework, only to be asked to come back to the office because of network issues.
- **Right now, it's time to put employees' health and safety first. Agencies must immediately enact continuity of operations plans giving them the maximum flexibility to increase telework and weather and safety leave for employees. Then they must immediately put that authority to use.**
- **This is the right decision for federal employees and for the communities where they work and live – and the only way for us to maximize our preventive efforts.**

BACKGROUND FROM March 18:

After taking piecemeal steps to address the coronavirus, the Office of Management and Budget on finally issued a direct call for all agencies to maximize telework across the nation and to ensure steps are in place to restrict access to federal facilities.

This is the type of decisive action AFGE has been advocating from the beginning in order to protect the health and safety of employees and the general public.

Some agencies have already taken corrective measures to stem the flow of this virus by initiating 100 percent telework for all workers, including at the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Education.





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Other departments have failed to take the necessary steps, including at the Department of Veterans Affairs – where a lack of leadership at the top of the agency has left individual VA hospitals and facilities on their own.

OMB has given agencies 48 hours to begin implementing CDC’s recommended safety procedures and policies to safeguard the health and safety of federal employees, contract employees, and the general public. Our union stands ready to work with agencies to help them through this process.

BACKGROUND FROM MARCH :

OMB’s memo issued Sunday evening encourages agencies to offer telework to all eligible employees in the D.C. area. While it’s the most direct action taken to date, it still doesn’t go far enough to protect federal workers and the public.

From the very beginning, our union has been calling on the administration to immediately allow all federal employees to telework if they are able.

OMB’s guidance only applies to the DMV area, where just 15 percent of federal workers live. Eight-five percent of federal employees live and work outside the nation’s capital, and nothing in this guidance applies to them.

The administration needs to take more direct action to protect federal employees and the public they serve by immediately ordering all federal employees nationwide to telework if the work they do can be accomplished at home.

That also means ensuring that employees have the equipment they need to do their work remotely. Not everyone whose work can be performed at home currently has the necessary equipment.

We also need to be doing everything we can to protect the workers who are reporting to duty every day at our nation’s airports, VA and military hospitals, federal prisons, and elsewhere. The jobs they do require their physical presence at the worksite, and they must be provided with the safety equipment and other resources needed to ensure their safety. We’re hearing troubling reports from our members that indicate there’s a lot more we need to be doing to protect them and the public.





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The lack of urgency we're seeing from this administration, and the reluctance to take immediate steps to protect federal workers and the public, is disappointing but hardly surprising.

This administration is more hostile to federal workers and their rights than any other administration we've seen. They've torn up or gutted our labor contracts wherever they can – leaving employees more vulnerable than ever at a time when literally their health and safety is on the line.

