



# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO



## NFFE News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Forest Service Employees' Union Slams USDA for Blocking Use of Administrative Leave during COVID-19 Pandemic

**Washington, D.C.** – Today, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), the union representing a majority of U.S. Forest Service employees, slammed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) publicly for blocking the U.S. Forest Service from granting employees use of administrative leave during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While many federal agencies and departments throughout the federal government have appropriately utilized administrative leave to aid workers coping with difficult circumstances associated with working from home during the pandemic, the USDA has failed to utilize the flexibilities it has, and Forest Service workers across the country are bearing the brunt of the Department's inaction.

"Employees of the U.S. Forest Service are furious that USDA will not give an inch on administrative leave for employees that in many cases need time to care for loved ones like children and elderly during the COVID-19 crisis," said Melissa Baumann, chair of the NFFE Forest Service Council. "USDA is expecting Forest Service employees to do the impossible. The Administration has already authorized federal Departments to allow employees administrative leave for these kinds of situations, yet USDA will not allow even a few hours of administrative leave per week for dedicated workers in difficult situations due to Coronavirus. It is infuriating and it needs to change."

USDA's unwillingness to budge on administrative leave during COVID-19 is just the latest issue grating Department employees. Since the start of this Administration, USDA has made significant efforts to reduce telework, which significantly hurt workers' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance, and coincidentally, made the Department's response to Coronavirus substantially more difficult. Under Trump, USDA has also spent a great deal of effort to undermine collective bargaining and effective labor relations, further needling Department employees. Concurrent to these efforts, USDA experienced huge decreases in employee engagement in both 2018 and 2019 according to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

"We have been trying to get through to USDA on this administrative leave issue, but they just will not listen," said Baumann. "We have dedicated Forest Service employees that are at their wits end trying to juggle a full work schedule while having full-time family obligations due to COVID-19. For some, there just are not enough hours in the day to do it all. As a result, many Forest Service employees are burning up annual leave hours, or worse, shifting to an unpaid leave status. It does not have to be this way. USDA could solve this problem with the stroke of pen just like many other agencies have done. If USDA cares about its employees, they will start embracing administrative leave for employees in need of it due to COVID-19."

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*Established in 1917, the National Federation of Federal Employees is the oldest union representing civil service federal employees. NFFE represents 110,000 federal employees in 35 departments and agencies government-wide including approximately 18,000 in the U.S. Forest Service. NFFE is affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO. For more information, go to [www.nffe.org](http://www.nffe.org).*