

# NFFE News



## **NFFE is Committed to Protecting Telework for Federal Employees**

April 18, 2023

Last week, the White House and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) [issued a memo](#) directing federal agencies to increase in-person work and scale back telework and remote work for federal employees when doing so would improve mission delivery and customer service. The instruction to agencies is to conduct a thorough self-assessment with a focus on Headquarters employees first. Employees like NFFE members who have a union and a collective bargaining agreement in force are more likely to keep existing telework and remote work arrangements than federal employees who don't yet have a union. Our primary concern is that some agencies will misinterpret the direction and substantially alter telework and remote work in violation of our rights as a unionized workforce. Collectively, we must take steps now to avoid that harmful outcome.

It is our understanding that the Biden administration issued this memo, in part, because agencies have not consistently captured data on telework that would refute unsubstantiated claims that telework has led to a decline in customer service. NFFE and unions representing federal employees were not consulted or given advance warning about this new guidance, but we have recently been briefed by top officials. We believe agencies can and should track and monitor their own performance. We agree with the Biden administration that in-person work where required should be meaningful. No one should be coming into the office just to log in to remote meetings all day. We hope our agencies will self-assess and determine what we already know to be true: telework has increased productivity among federal employees, reduced burnout, enhanced work/life balance, bolstered recruitment and retention, and can largely remain at existing levels to meet federal agency missions.

NFFE appreciates the members of this union who do not have the option to telework and those who have been working in-person since the start of the COVID pandemic. It is our understanding that these policy updates will not have an impact on your work schedules. We are also making sure Congress and the media have their facts straight that most public-facing and customer service positions rarely, if ever, telework. Customer service and mission-delivery challenges, real or perceived, are not the result of maximum telework, but are the direct result of staffing shortages and insufficient funding by Congress.

NFFE has substantial power to protect existing telework and remote work arrangements. Before any changes can be made to telework agreements, agencies must first engage with unions and develop revised Work Environment Plans. Locals should contact Labor Relations as soon as possible to request this engagement and identify indicators you want included during the agency's assessment of the success of telework and remote work in the agency. Most of this work will happen where we have successful partnerships in agencies. This is the right time and an important issue to establish a partnership if your local does not yet have it in place. After the Work Environment Plans are complete, NFFE locals have the right to bargain with management regarding the implementation of this new guidance. We expect current CBAs and agreements that allow telework to be adhered to and we will enforce them.

Since President Biden took office, his administration has been committed to empowering federal workers and building a government workforce that is prepared for the future. Telework is undoubtedly part of that future. We will use every tool at our disposal to preserve telework and enforce our rights. NFFE will provide updates as they become available.

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