



TESTIMONY OF

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For a Hearing

BEFORE

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Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce

ON

“Oversight of Federal Agencies’ Post-Pandemic Telework Policies”

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Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Mfume, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

It is a privilege to appear before you today to represent the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its Management Directorate.

I am honored to represent the more than 260,000 personnel at DHS who respond to our nation's most serious threats and proudly serve the American public every day. I want to thank this Subcommittee and Congress for your attention on how we continue to successfully accomplish our mission. I also want to especially thank our employees and their families for the sacrifices they make every day, no matter the circumstance, to ensure this Department continues its critical work while maintaining the highest level of professional excellence.

DHS leverages data to align our use of workplace flexibilities to effectively meet mission requirements. Even at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 64 percent of the workforce—myself included—continued to work in person. Since 2021, we have seen a steady increase of on-site work across DHS mission areas. As of July 2023, our payroll data indicate that approximately 73 percent of DHS employees nationwide report in person every day. Including those who can telework, 85 percent of the nationwide workforce and 61 percent within the National Capital Region (NCR) are on-site at least 50 percent of the time, and the vast majority are on-site substantially more than that.

The entire DHS senior leadership team recognizes the importance of anticipating and adapting to rapidly evolving future work environments and positioning DHS to lead the way using every enabling tool at our disposal. As we emerge from the pandemic, we recognize the criticality and time-sensitivity of incorporating lessons learned into our new work environment, in a way that enhances mission effectiveness and performance. We appreciate your attention on telework and remote work, and we also recognize these flexibilities are just one part of what it means to be mission ready in this evolving work environment.

Our employees continue to express the benefit and value of workplace flexibilities for themselves, their families, and their communities as they foster work/life balance, minimize their commutes, and enhance their mental health and well-being, while effectively and meaningfully accomplishing the DHS mission and providing excellent customer service. DHS conducts quarterly workforce pulse surveys to supplement the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data. Employees indicated telework and remote work flexibilities are a key driver of effectiveness and satisfaction, as well as a signal of leadership trust and their empowerment to fully perform their jobs.

Offering workplace flexibilities allows DHS to remain competitive in a labor market where applicants overwhelmingly apply to remote or telework jobs. This bolsters our recruitment efforts and, equally or even more importantly, enables us to retain people in critical positions in areas that are historically below funded allocations, such as human capital and contracting. Increased recruitment and retention, coupled with decreased attrition, enhance our ability to effectively accomplish our critical homeland security missions.

Over the past three years, the Department's organizational health and performance have

remained steady, and we continue to look for ways to further enhance mission delivery that directly impact the American public. Many of the recent operational and technology changes continue to add value today, improving our ability to quickly adjust and respond to a dynamic and evolving threat landscape. As one example, in response to an unprecedented global pandemic, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) ran front-line mass vaccination sites and coordinated support to state and local COVID response activities, while developing Resource Roadmaps to help communities navigate pandemic recovery.

Despite pandemic-related supply chain issues, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) continued to process significant volumes of imported goods, and in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 alone, processed 39.1 million entries valued at over \$3.35 trillion, a 19.46 percent increase from FY 2021. Despite these significant increases, CBP protected the public from fraudulent goods, reducing the burden to businesses enrolled in trusted shipper programs. DHS also served as the lead federal agency for Operation Allies Welcome, which supported the arrival of 84,600 evacuees from Afghanistan. In addition, we recently simplified online paperwork processes to improve the customer experience by using pre-populated form fields, reusing existing entries, and building responsive, mobile-friendly experiences that reduced the total amount of time the public spends accessing DHS services by 20 million hours annually.

I cannot state enough, the Department remains focused on protecting the homeland. To this end, DHS is using a range of existing quantitative and qualitative data, regularly collected from DHS Components, to monitor organizational health, organizational performance, and work environment. Data helps us identify gaps, assess progress, and establish a baseline of measurable objectives across DHS Components to ensure we meet requirements in the Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-23-15, “Measuring, Monitoring, and Improving Organizational Health and Organizational Performance in the Context of Evolving Agency Work Environments,” which outlines steps for federal agencies to increase in-person work. By leveraging data, we are also able to determine if the use of workplace flexibilities is having the intended positive impact on improved employee recruitment and retention—such as an 11 percent increase in filled Mission Critical Occupations (MCOs) when comparing the period just prior to the pandemic to early-2023. The Department has historically been unable to fully staff or retain talent in MCOs such as human capital, procurement, and IT specialists. These types of positions are vital to ensuring those on the front line can execute their missions; the increase in MCOs represents 950 additional staff supporting them.

DHS harnesses existing processes such as the quarterly Human Resources Statistics (HR Stat) reviews with each Component to better understand workforce data and potential mission impacts. These reviews also help identify challenges and opportunities where the Department can leverage best practices to address common problems. For example, looking out to 2026, we forecasted the top-five job series of retirement-eligible employees to facilitate succession planning and hiring plans. Additionally, nine of 11 Components currently have staffing levels at or above 2020 levels. HR Stat insights, such as these, inform our recruitment efforts and identify best practices to share across the enterprise, particularly among the organizations with room for improvement.

This summer, the Management Directorate issued refresher guidance to our workforce on appropriate use and coding of telework and remote work. This guidance reminds employees and supervisors of their responsibilities in time and attendance accuracy, which strengthens our oversight efforts to ensure workplace flexibilities are used appropriately. Additionally, it increases data accuracy to inform future decisions about our work environment and effectiveness. We are also prioritizing system integration and data across Components to monitor and enhance our governance of telework and remote work as it correlates to employee performance and mission accomplishment. All are inherently linked.

The Department invested heavily in the tools needed for our employees to be successful while working away from the office. Through the application of collaborative IT tools such as Microsoft Teams, or the use of telework kits including monitors and keyboards, the Department has invested in employee productivity. These capabilities also enable DHS to advance its resilience in the face of severe weather or emergencies. The traditional concept of a “snow day” often does not apply for telework or remote workers; they continue to get the job done from alternate locations. Likewise, having a partially dispersed workforce in the NCR enhances the Department’s continuity of operations posture in unforeseen emergencies as well.

Lessons learned from elevated telework and remote work during the pandemic have accelerated our planning for future space reductions. The Government Accountability Office’s preliminary review of real property utilization data from 24 departments and agencies within the NCR assessed DHS to be in the top quartile for building usage. Even with this recognition, we know we can do even more to right-size our portfolio. By focusing on utilization data—that is, how our facilities are actually being used on a daily basis—we have significantly reduced our real property footprint and created flexible space that is more easily adapted to how our employees work. For example, in FY 2023, we reduced our footprint in the NCR by 450,000 rentable square feet, achieving a cost avoidance of nearly \$16 million annually. This consolidation strategy enables DHS to work towards less space, but better space. Furthermore, this approach delivers an improved working environment designed to enhance collaboration, and it will have a positive impact on our employee morale.

DHS continues to pursue workplace optimization that we started prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Considerable progress was made toward production of mature, actionable, enterprise-level data to support evidence-based policy and resource decision-making. This includes a focus on existing and new data on cost, utilization, and workforce location, such as IT network access, physical access, and self-reported locations. We recognized our buildings were not fully utilized, and through measurement tools such as Personal Identity Verification card swipes and computer access, and site visits, we were able to inform Components about returning excess space to the General Services Administration. Facility usage data continues to enable the Department to be good stewards of limited taxpayer dollars.

Accordingly, DHS executed numerous space optimization projects. As an example, DHS reduced its NCR portfolio by 1.16 million rentable square feet between 2018 and 2023. We plan to continue to optimize our NCR portfolio. While this process started within the NCR, one of our most expensive real estate portfolios, we are implementing this workplace strategy nationwide. The 30-year cost avoidance to the Department for these NCR reductions is roughly

\$1.4 billion. Our goal of “fewer buildings/better buildings” is good for our workforce, good for the DHS mission, and good for the taxpayer.

Conclusion

Moving forward, the Department is committed to refining and enhancing data collection and leveraging this important information to drive mission outcomes. Integrating building utilization and performance data with key management controls such as the annual interagency Strategic Review, the quarterly Deputy Secretary-led Performance Reviews, and the quarterly DHS Chief Human Capital Officer HR Stat report will ensure DHS remains responsive to the issues and interests of the Subcommittee.

We will continuously assess the impacts of management policies, such as our use of telework, remote work, and workplace flexibilities, on our mission effectiveness to serve and protect the American people. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.