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Opening Statement

Rep. Stephen F. Lynch, Ranking Member

Hearing on "Addressing the Backlog in the Federal Employee Retirement Process"

December 10, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Farenthold, for holding this hearing to examine the progress made by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in addressing the backlog and timeliness in the processing of federal retirement claims since the last time we held a hearing on this issue in May 2013.

These last few years have been especially hard on federal employees who have had to endure an onslaught of attacks from some members of Congress on their pay, benefits, and due process rights. So, I am glad that Chairman Farenthold and I can agree that Congress and OPM must ensure that our federal employees receive timely and accurate pension payments upon their retirement. Our nation's dedicated public servants deserve no less. The Chairman and I are both sensitive to the financial hardship that a backlog and long delays in claims processing may cause and have caused some federal retirees.

I commend OPM for successfully achieving its 2012 strategic plan goal of reducing the retirement claims backlog to a manageable level from a peak of 60,000 claims in January 2012 to 14,000 claims at the beginning of this month. Sequestration made that accomplishment harder to achieve. A large increase in retirement applications resulting from early retirement and buyout offers from the Postal Service also did not help matters.

While I believe that OPM has made great strides in reducing its backlog, it still falls short of its goal to process 90% of new retirement cases within 60 days, having only reached 83% as of the end of last month. And, while I think that OPM's incremental approach to modernizing its retirement claims systems makes sense, it appears that the agency is making much slower progress on this front.

OPM has noted that implementation of many of the IT initiatives spelled out in OPM's February Strategic Information Technology Plan are dependent upon the receipt of sufficient funding. I'd like to explore the support that OPM would need from Congress to ensure that it can modernize its retirement claims systems. I believe that the long-term sustainability of OPM's progress depends heavily upon a transition from a paper-based, manual process to an electronic process.

Thank you, Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to revisit the status of OPM's retirement claims processing and look forward to hearing from our panel members.

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