

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

H.R. 4171, a Bill to Extend the Authority to Conduct Telework Travel Expenses Test Programs

November 2, 2017

Mr. Chairman, I thank Representative Gianforte and Ranking Member Connolly for their work on this bill to extend the authority for agencies to conduct telework pilot programs for travel expenses.

The current authority for this program expires on December 8, 2017, and would be extended by the bill to December 31, 2020.

In February 2012, the United States Patent and Trademark Office used this authority to initiate the Telework Enhancement Act Pilot Program. This program allows PTO employees to work throughout the country and waives the requirement that the agency pay their travel costs for mandatory trips back to its headquarters. According to PTO, the program significantly expanded the agency's teleworking workforce and allowed it to hire and retain a highly skilled workforce. Currently, there are 2,500 participants in the pilot out of 6,100 full-time teleworking employees.

A 3-year extension of the program would allow PTO to continue making improvements and provide sufficient time to develop a budget proposal to pay for the travel costs of employees. PTO estimates that the travel costs for the additional 3 years would be approximately \$3.5 million.

PTO also estimates that this program has saved the agency \$77.4 million in fiscal year 2016, including \$17.1 million in avoided real estate costs and \$31.5 million in reduced recruitment expenses.

The agency also cites increased productivity, work hours, and employee morale, and decreased environmental impacts as benefits of the pilot.

Given its benefits, it makes sense to authorize a short extension of this pilot program.

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