



SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

September 13, 2023

The Honorable James Comer
Chair, Committee on Oversight and Accountability
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Committee Chair Comer:

Thank you for your May 18, 2023 letter regarding the Social Security Administration's (SSA) practices regarding telework and remote work. I am glad to provide you with more details on these important topics.

For more than 85 years, SSA has provided income protection for retirees, individuals with disabilities, and families that lose a wage-earner. With almost 90 percent of seniors over the age of 65 receiving Social Security benefits, and over 70 million Social Security beneficiaries and Supplemental Security Income recipients depending on us, we are committed to delivering high quality service to our customers.

Despite the size of our agency, and scope of our programs, for decades we have managed performance and work across geographical lines. We have over 59,000 employees nationwide. The vast majority are frontline workers located across the country in our approximately 1,200 field offices, 162 hearing offices, 24 teleservice centers, and 8 processing centers. Our headquarters is located in Woodlawn, Maryland although we do have a small headquarters office in Washington, DC.

SSA's telework policy prioritizes customer service. Telework is not one-size-fits-all. Management determines which positions are telework-eligible and the telework frequency based on work requirements. Post pandemic, all but about 1,000 employees are in telework-eligible positions. Employees in frontline direct service positions, which account for about 75 percent of our workforce, have been reporting to the office since reentry in April 2022. Field office employees, who see the public in person, report onsite at least three days a week.

Before we transitioned from pandemic telework to reentry to our offices, I asked each of our Deputy Commissioners to reassess which of their component's jobs were eligible for telework, the amount of onsite work, the number of telework days, recruitment and retention needs, and their oversight plans for managing telework. In addition, we conducted a reentry evaluation on our performance and continue to monitor our performance for the proper balance of our hybrid work environment. In October, we will be increasing our onsite presence in our headquarters offices. Our telework policy empowers managers to change or terminate telework schedules, suspend telework in advance of the workday, or recall employees to the office the same day to address onsite customer service needs. Our policy and negotiated labor agreements require telework eligible employees formally agree to the terms of our telework agreement.

All telework-eligible employees are equipped with a laptop secured under Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 standards, which they use at both the official duty station (ODS) and alternate duty station (ADS). Teleworkers use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) at the ADS to ensure a secure connection to agency systems. The employee's VPN traffic is secured using encryption methodologies that meet Agency and Federal guidelines. As a result, teleworkers at their ADS have the same level of network security and access to the same communications tools and agency data assets and Federal records they would have at the ODS, enabling them to be fully productive while teleworking.

We have long had metrics and robust management information systems that capture our incoming, pending, and completed workloads, which managers use to ensure we are handling work within available resources and to monitor employee performance. The same performance management processes and metrics apply to employees whether they are working at their ADS or working at their ODS. Managers assign work and use workload reports, case clearances, project deliverables, time and attendance systems, communications tools—the same methods for tracking work at the ODS—when monitoring employees during telework.

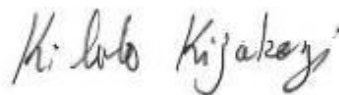
We also follow locality pay policy. Upon reentry, we required all teleworkers to confirm the information for their current ADS and complete an updated telework agreement in accordance with agency policy and negotiated labor agreements. Employees may only have one ADS and must report any changes (i.e., if the employee moves.) We followed 5 CFR 531.605 to determine locality pay.

The hybrid work environment and portable workloads at our nonpublic facing sites have presented us with an opportunity to institute space sharing or hoteling when doing so supports our mission and makes business sense. Presently, we have a planned reduction of over 1.1 million square feet from FY 2024 through FY 2028, which would equate to about \$35 million in rent cost avoidance that we can redirect to serving more people. Put another way, this \$35 million is equivalent to about 350 overtime work years or the full year equivalent of 350 additional hires for the agency and would pay for about 20,000 initial disability claims. This reduction includes consolidating staff from our Falls Church location into our Washington, DC office by using space sharing and hoteling. We continue to actively plan for sustainable and space-optimized work arrangements.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have additional questions or wish to discuss this issue in more detail, please contact me or have your staff contact Tom Klouda, our Deputy Commissioner for Legislation and Congressional Affairs, at (202) 358-6030.

I am sending a similar response to the cosigners of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Kilolo Kijakazi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kilolo" and last name "Kijakazi" clearly distinguishable.

Kilolo Kijakazi, Ph.D., M.S.W.
Acting Commissioner