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Public Service Hearing: Improving Basic Hiring Processes

Public Statement

of

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Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) role in Federal Hiring Process to support agencies in building the Federal workforce. As the Deputy Associate Director of Talent Acquisition and Workforce Shaping at OPM, I appreciate the opportunity to give you an overview of the efforts we are taking to ensure the Federal government's hiring process is agile and builds a workforce that reflects the public it serves.

The American people expect and deserve the best service from the Federal Government. This requires a talented, highly skilled Federal workforce that is drawn from the rich diversity of the people it serves. The Federal Government has a unique opportunity to attract talented individuals from multiple sectors to work on a variety of compelling missions. However, too often, implementation challenges and myths related to the hiring process get in the way of bringing in top talent and advancing skilled employees.

The President's Management Agenda sets forth a long-term vision for effective government on behalf of the American people. It identifies "workforce for the 21st century" as a key driver of transformation, with particular emphasis on implementing targeted "people" strategies including a focus on maximizing employee engagement and performance; reskilling and redeploying human capital resources to align with evolving mission needs; and enabling simple and strategic hiring practices to attract top talent to keep up with the current pace of change.

Each agency is responsible for identifying, defining, and executing its own mission. This process includes determining the size of their workforce necessary to complete goals; balancing a restrained budgetary environment with the critical aims of the agency; understanding responsible workforce allocations in order to identify populations of prospective employees in a given region; and working with existing employees in order to understand their needs and their motivations for remaining on the job. OPM recognizes these responsibilities are challenging, and, as such, we take continual actions to best assist agencies in building a Federal workforce in a way that is fair, open, and equitable.

The most common hiring barrier cited is the time it takes to hire a new employee. OPM continues to work with agencies to focus on improving agency execution of the hiring process, with particular emphasis on shortening the time required to hire and reducing the burden on applicants. However, we recognize that time-to-hire is not a perfect metric for success. We must also look at the quality of the hire and whether those hired have the skill sets that are fully aligned with agencies' current and projected mission needs. Past efforts have focused on reducing time-to-hire, and with concerted effort and attention, agencies were able to demonstrate significant improvements to speed of hiring. Informed by various data sources such as management satisfaction with the quality of referred job candidates, OPM also led efforts to help drive broader improvements to the quality of hiring. We continue to focus on these efforts, and are putting tools in place to enable HR professionals and managers to achieve these multi-dimensional goals, and further the Administration's goal of reducing burdens in the hiring process. Proactive measures include investing in better tools and technology to support hiring, such as: more robust applicant assessment tools; development of a technology based "wizard" to offer managers direct input into hiring activities; building the capacity of the HR workforce through training and institutionalizing HR capabilities across Government; and empowering managers to actively participate in the hiring process.

OPM is also looking at ways to provide tools to agencies that can help them improve the way they assess hundreds of thousands of applications for Federal jobs. USA HireSM is a professionally-designed library of more than 900 off-the-shelf assessment solutions created to target specific competencies, occupations, and/or job families. These assessments cover 120 occupational series. The assessments' use of cutting-edge techniques like online simulations and avatar-based assessment items are realistic and engaging to job applicants. In addition to providing refined competency measurements to produce higher quality candidates, the assessments can help reduce time-to-hire because they are scored automatically and reduce the burden involved in administering more traditional assessments, particularly in cases where large numbers of applicants must be evaluated. Our scoring system efficiently screens out unqualified applicants at the outset, and then reduces the applicant pool to the most qualified job candidates in a particularly effective and efficient way. Reactions from applicants who have used USA HireSM have been overwhelmingly favorable, with 97 percent of applicants reporting the process is user-friendly and over 90 percent reporting satisfaction with the assessment process.

OPM is continually encouraging agencies to spotlight the value they place on diversity and inclusion in the workplace and to redouble their efforts to ensure their recruitment reaches all segments of society. OPM is also working with agencies to examine their existing programs to raise their awareness of the retention tools agencies already have at their disposal. These retention tools can come in the form of compensation, workplace flexibilities, educational and development opportunities, and the development of clear, focused career paths for each employee. By engaging with employees in career development planning, agencies can benefit both their organizations and their employees by aligning employee career paths with agency

missions. OPM and agencies are seeking to maximize opportunities for employees to improve, whether through mentoring and coaching, the development of common training programs for areas of frequent need, or through rotational opportunities like the President's Management Council's Interagency Rotation Program.

OPM realizes that our work has diverse audiences, and this includes Federal hiring managers and human resources staff. The hiring authorities available to agencies, strategic recruitment, and assessments can be complicated to navigate. To address these challenges, OPM efforts included reaching out to Federal hiring managers and human resources professionals nationwide to educate them on the importance of collaboration at various stages of the hiring process. Some of these key inflection points include: the upfront planning before a hiring need is identified through workforce, succession, and staff acquisition plans; the recruitment strategy that identifies the sources for recruitment, taking into account the skills required for the position, the skills on hand, and the skills gaps and imbalances; identifying and validating critical duties, responsibilities, and competencies for the position and collaborating to determine the best way to assess these competencies in potential candidates; working together to develop a strong job opportunity announcement that compels applicants to apply for a position; and evaluating and selecting the best candidates as quickly and efficiently as possible.

OPM is also continuing to work to improve the applicant experience. OPM understands the nature of concerns from both applicants and Congress about lengthy job applications on USAJOBS. OPM regularly makes improvements to USAJOBS, which are guided by customer feedback. OPM has invested in improving the design, features, and tools to make USAJOBS more user-friendly and to evolve the site from a job board to a full-featured career site. This has included working with stakeholders across the Federal Government, convening work groups, and receiving user feedback through interviews and focus groups. This feedback has resulted in the implementation of user-friendly updates including a mobile-friendly website; a revised application process; improved search tools; a new help center; a "hiring paths" feature that allows candidates to explore a variety of hiring paths that may be applicable to individuals with certain backgrounds or qualifications such as students, people with disabilities, or those who have never worked in the Federal Government; and an urgent hiring needs page that showcases high demand occupations such as cybersecurity and engineering. Expanded tools, like résumé mining, allow applicants to opt in to have their résumé included in a searchable database where hiring managers can search for candidates with specific skills, educational credentials, or certifications, and invite them to apply for openings. Currently more than 1.5 million applicants have opted in to include their résumé in the résumé mining database.

Forward-thinking change is also what drove the creation of the Pathways Programs. The Pathways Programs, which has been in existence for over 7 years, provide an opportunity for students and recent graduates to begin their Federal careers early. Research tells us that students and recent graduates about to enter the workforce believe in public service and want to make a difference. The Federal government needs to harness that innovative spirit and commitment to

service, and that is exactly what our Pathways Programs continue to do. With more Federal employees becoming eligible for retirement, the Pathways Programs have become a great resource for agencies to help bolster our civil service ranks. OPM continues to establish and improve relationships with institutions of higher learning, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and others such as National Centers of Academic Excellence for cybersecurity. OPM uses these relationships to educate students and academic advisors about the benefits of public service, Federal employment opportunities and careers, and to showcase the features that make the Federal Government a unique employer. In fiscal year 2018, OPM expanded academic engagement efforts, reaching approximately 630 institutions of higher learning, to educate students, academic advisors, career counselors, and other influencers about Federal employment and provided resources to help them advise students.

Through the examples outlined above, as well as through the work OPM does every day, we are taking great steps to assist the Federal government in recruiting and retaining a workforce that represents the American public it serves and fulfills the commitment each agency holds. Thank you again for having me here today, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.