

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION®

July 25, 2022

The Honorable Shalanda D. Young  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
Washington, DC 20503

The Honorable Kiran Ahuja  
Director  
Office of Personnel Management  
Washington, DC 20415

The Honorable Robin Carnahan  
Administrator  
General Services Administration  
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Director Young, Director Ahuja, and Administrator Carnahan:

As the threat of COVID-19 stabilizes and recedes, we believe the Federal government's pandemic-era telework, remote work, and travel policies may no longer be appropriate. With American life starting to return to normal, an increasing number of Americans expect their government to do the same and provide the same level of engagement, access, and service that was available before the pandemic. Therefore, to serve the public's best interests, we respectfully ask that you promptly reassess Federal guidance for agency telework, remote work, and travel policies to encourage a safe return to pre-pandemic operations wherever possible.

In keeping with the spirit of Executive Order 13991 to use the best available data and science to guide agency decisions, it's important to note COVID-related hospitalizations remain at a 2-year low<sup>1</sup>, with a mortality rate on the decline due to the widespread availability of COVID vaccines and treatments.<sup>2</sup>

We understand the challenges associated with a return to in-person work and travel, but the longer the government takes to start the transition back to conventional operations, the longer the public, Federal workers, and the economy at-large will suffer from outdated practices that fail to keep up with new information and the current needs of the country.

Experience shows virtual environments are no substitute for in-person work. In-person work not only creates critical space for more dynamic collaborations, public engagement, and professional development, but also strengthens minority voices in most group settings<sup>3</sup>—all of which are needed to provide for high-quality public service.

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<sup>1</sup> [According to May 2022 data from Johns Hopkins University.](#)

<sup>2</sup> The 7-day average mortality rate for COVID-19 infections was 0.37% on July 20, 2022, compared to a 7.5% rate on April 12, 2020, according to [data from Johns Hopkins University.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [CNBC. "45% of women business leaders say it's difficult for women to speak up in virtual meetings" \(September 3, 2020\)](#)

Further, evidence shows in-person work and travel are valuable human capital tools that can be used to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. People from disadvantaged communities often lack the personal connections and institutional support needed to propel their careers and remain competitive. That's why the informal interactions and connections made through in-person work and travel are critically important to their professional growth, and therefore often highly valued.

To ensure the public and Federal workers are best-served by agency telework, remote work, and travel policies, we recommend redeveloping the [saferfederalworkforce.gov](https://www.saferfederalworkforce.gov) website and reissuing Federal guidance<sup>4</sup> to recognize the value of in-person work and travel, encouraging agencies to return to pre-pandemic operations wherever possible. This would allow agencies to continue or resume preventive measures if necessary, while ensuring the most harmful aspects of pandemic-era practices do not persist as baseline policy. We hope you will take this into consideration as you work to create an environment conducive to professional growth and high-quality public service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tori Emerson Barnes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Tori Emerson Barnes**  
Executive Vice President  
Public Affairs and Policy

CC: [Chief Human Capital Officers of the Executive Branch](#)

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<sup>4</sup> Including memorandums [M-21-25](#) (issued June 10, 2021) and [CPM 2021-17](#) (issued July 23, 2021).