

GARY C. PETERS, MICHIGAN, CHAIRMAN

THOMAS R. CARPER, DELAWARE
MAGGIE HASSAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
KYRSTEN SINEMA, ARIZONA
JACKY ROSEN, NEVADA
ALEX PADILLA, CALIFORNIA
JON OSSOFF, GEORGIA
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, CONNECTICUT

RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA
MITT ROMNEY, UTAH
RICK SCOTT, FLORIDA
JOSH HAWLEY, MISSOURI
ROGER MARSHALL, KANSAS

DAVID M. WEINBERG, STAFF DIRECTOR
WILLIAM E. HENDERSON III, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
LAURA W. KILBRIDE, CHIEF CLERK

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

July 10, 2023

The Honorable Kiran Ahuja
Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Director Ahuja:

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) administers the federal retirement services program. For decades, this program has failed to quickly serve federal retirees, and as a result, backlogs and delays in processing retirement applications is a longstanding problem. In 2019, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that while the agency had “developed a strategic vision for modernizing the current paper-based application,” OPM’s modernization plan “lacks cost estimates and timelines, which means there are no measurable results with which to evaluate resource needs or interim progress.”¹ To address these shortcomings, GAO made six recommendations for executive action, five of which remain open over four years later.

While OPM fails to make significant progress on identifying and correcting the underlying causes of the retirement services backlog, the backlog is unacceptable. The inventory of claims spiraled out of control and reached its zenith in March 2022 with 36,349 open cases. Even as the inventory has begun to decline, the claims processing time has continued to increase; in March of 2023, over two-thirds of the claims took more than 60 days to process. Of that group, it took OPM an average of 142 days to process claims. Congressional offices across the country are receiving high volumes of calls from concerned, and at times, desperate retirees. This backlog directly harms retired civil servants and their beneficiaries.

In Oklahoma, my staff has found it difficult to obtain timely inquiry responses from OPM. These wait times have extended beyond a year for a few cases. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be uncommon.² The frequency and volume of requests to me and my colleagues illustrate that OPM is failing to deliver on a basic promise it has made to our civil servants. I cannot help but imagine that for every one person who calls a Congressional office, there are countless others who suffer in silence. The delays in both response and in processing of retirement applications result in genuine difficulty for constituents and, too often, financial harm.

Please respond to the following questions and requests no later than July 20, 2023:

1. What progress has OPM made to adopt management practices to enhance the use of performance information on processing timeliness to inform how OPM manages operations, identifies problem areas, and allocates resources?

¹ U.S. GOV’T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-19-217, FEDERAL RETIREMENT: OPM ACTIONS NEEDED TO IMPROVE APPLICATION PROCESSING TIMES 31 (2019).

² Letter from Richard J. Durbin, U.S. Sen., to Kiran Ahuja, Dir. of the U.S. Off. of Pers. Mgmt. (Apr. 3, 2023) (available at <https://www.durbin.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Letter%20to%20OPM%20regarding%20delays%20with%20processing%20retirement%20benefits%20FINAL.pdf>).

2. What progress has OPM made to develop and implement policies and procedures for assessing strategies intended to improve processing times, including collecting and improving data needed to support those strategies?
3. What progress has OPM made to examine its process for assessing its assistance to agencies on retirement applications?
4. What progress has OPM made to work with agencies to determine if there are cost-effective ways to make the retirement application error report that it sends to agencies more user friendly?
5. What progress has OPM made in developing, documenting, and implementing a Retirement Services IT modernization plan for initial project phases that is consistent with key aspects of IT project management, such as determining objectives, costs, and time frames for each initial phase?
6. What are the objectives, estimated costs, and estimated time frames for OPM's retirement services IT modernization? Please provide any documentation used to establish these objectives, estimated costs, and estimated time frames.
7. What resources has OPM devoted to accomplish retirement services IT modernization?
8. Has OPM submitted a project proposal for retirement services IT modernization to the Technology Modernization Fund? If so, please provide the project proposal? If not, please explain why not.

Please reach out with any questions to Clark Hedrick on my staff at Clark_Hedrick@hsgac.senate.gov. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

In God We Trust,



James Lankford

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Government Operations
and Border Management