



SOCIAL SECURITY

November 5, 2021

NUC/AFGE-2022-0007

Rich Couture
AFGE General Committee Spokesperson
1441 Main Street, Suite 450
Springfield, MA 01103

By email only Richard.Couture@ssa.gov

Dear Mr. Couture:

This is notice of the Social Security Administration's ("SSA" or "Agency") plan for a safe increased return of employees to physical workplaces ("Reentry Plan") and updated Workplace Safety Plan ("WSP 2.0"). These actions are being taken in accordance with Executive Order (E.O.) 13991, "Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask Wearing," issued January 21, 2021; Office of Management and Budget (OMB) memorandum M-21-25, "Integrating Planning for a Safe Increased Return of Federal Employees and Contractors to Physical Workplaces with Post-Reentry Personnel Policies and Work Environment;" and policy guidance issued by the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force (<https://www.saferfederalworkforce.gov/>).

The nature and scope of the proposed change is described in the Reentry Plan and WSP 2.0 (see Attachment). At this time, the Agency is not proposing any change to its policies prohibiting personal fans and requiring physical distancing in common areas, which were communicated in the notification of March 15, 2021. Additionally, during reentry and the evaluation period, the Agency's safety protocols and pandemic response will include following items:

1. The Agency may open doors to the public before 9 a.m. in Field Offices, as needed;
2. The Agency may offer expanded flexible bands (i.e. Office of Hearings Operations; Office of Analytics, Review, and Oversight; Operations, Regional Office staff and Deputy Commissioner of Operations Headquarters Staff);
3. For headquarters facilities only:
 - a. Limiting entrances and garage access at the main campus (seven connected buildings) and access controls;
 - b. Cafeteria services will not be offered at initial reentry but will be evaluated;

c. Shuttle services to Washington, D.C. and other locations will not be offered; SSA's Reentry Plan, including WSP 2.0, affects all components, agency-wide. While the Agency's phased reentry will commence on December 1, 2021, the proposed implementation date for bargaining unit employees is January 3, 2022. Dates related to the proposed implementation of the plan are contained in the Reentry Plan itself.

The Agency is prepared to engage in bargaining on a pre-implementation basis over the procedures and appropriate arrangements for employees affected by the Reentry Plan and related measures included with this notice. Such bargaining will not include policies that are unchanged by the attachment (e.g. methods of contact tracing), or are subject to separate bargaining (e.g. implementation of the vaccine mandate contained in EO 14043 (notice provided to AFGE on September 24, 2021), updated cleaning procedures (notice provided to AFGE on August 9, 2021), etc.), or matters that are already addressed in the 2019 SSA-AFGE National Agreement. Management reserves its rights to make additional changes to the Workplace Safety Plan and related policies affecting employees as conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the agency's response change in the future. When such changes are made, SSA will continue to provide notice and an opportunity to bargain to the extent required by 5 USC chapter 71.

Please contact me at Laura.Heigert@ssa.gov if you would like a briefing or consultation on this topic. If you desire to engage in negotiations over this issue, please identify the Union's team members and provide us with proposed dates for negotiations. I look forward to working with you on this important initiative.

Sincerely,

/s/ Laura Heigert

Laura Heigert
Office of Labor-Management
and Employee Relations

Attachment

1. Reentry Plan
2. Spreadsheet referenced in Reentry Plan Appendix 2, Footnote 7

CC: Ms. Barri Sue Bryant
President, AFGE Local 2809

Ms. Beverly Parks
President, AFGE Council 109

Mr. Ralph De Juliis
President, AFGE Council 220

Mr. Earl Tucker
President, AFGE Council 224

Mr. Shelley Washington
Executive Vice President, Local 1923 (Headquarters)

Ms. Iris Rakowski
Local Representative, AFGE Local 2809