

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2023

Director Kiran Ahuja
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415-1000

Dear Director Ahuja,

We write to express our concern with the excessive delays federal retirees in our states are facing as they wait to obtain their hard-earned retirement benefits. It has been reported that average retirement processing times have been far above the agency's stated goal of 60 days—instead often exceeding 90 days. We are aware of at least one case that has been in processing for fifteen months. We also have experienced delayed response times to congressional inquiries.

Our nation's federal retirees are dedicated public servants who often have provided decades of essential work that is vital in keeping our government running, despite being subjected to uncertainty due to hiring freezes, continuing resolutions, and other budget constraints. We are aware that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is working to implement the changes needed to better serve federal retirees. As OPM modernizes and improves the federal retirement system, we request that you provide a timely response to the following questions:

1. A recent report found that OPM received close to twice as many retirement claims in January 2023 as it did the previous month.¹ What is OPM's plan to handle the increased caseload without further extending processing time?
2. Is OPM adequately staffed? If not, in which office in the agency are additional staffing resources most needed?
3. What assistance from Congress does OPM need to maintain a fully staffed workforce and process retirees' applications in a timely manner?
4. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that OPM has a continued reliance on paper-based applications and manual processing, which contributes to processing delays.² OPM's 2022-2026 strategic vision includes an initiative to modernize the application process, including developing an electronic application form and an electronic system to store retirement information. A pilot digital retirement system, which is based on OPM's modernization initiative, already has been rolled out. How many retirees has the pilot served so far? What is OPM's plan to expeditiously expand the program across the agency? What is the estimated cost of implementing digitization?

¹ <https://www.federaltimes.com/fedlife/2022/09/09/why-its-taking-so-long-for-your-federal-retirement-to-process/>

² <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-217.pdf>

5. The same GAO report found that OPM uses methods, such as hiring additional staff and using overtime pay to address large caseload amounts and understaffing issues; however, it also found that OPM does not “measure overtime productivity or correlate overtime data with application processing data.” Does OPM plan to measure how these strategies affect application processing and productivity in the future? What other strategies is OPM using to reduce processing time, and how is it measuring the effectiveness of those strategies?
6. Reports have shown that incomplete applications are contributing to the delays. What are the underlying reasons for the incomplete applications? Is the application sufficiently accessible to all applicants? Does OPM provide timely assistance with the process, either by phone, online, or another method? What is OPM’s plan to cut down on the number of incomplete applications?
7. There are third-party consulting companies that advertise assistance to federal retirees to speed up the processing of their retirement claims. Is OPM aware of these companies? What impact, if any, do they have on the speed by which OPM processes retirement claims? If they have no impact, what outreach is OPM conducting to prevent retirees from unnecessarily paying for these services?

We cannot fail to serve the public servants who have dedicated so many years to keeping our government running. We look forward to your timely response to this letter.

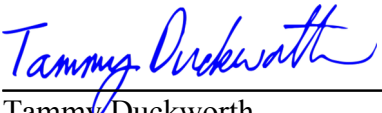
Sincerely,



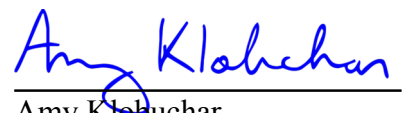
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



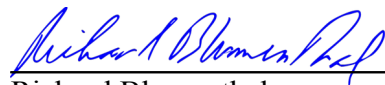
Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



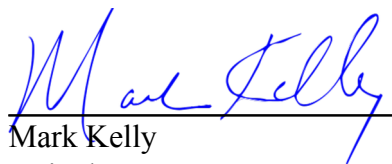
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster
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