

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 28, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

After more than a year of battling the COVID-19 virus, our communities are reopening and life is beginning to return to normal. Nationwide, the number of coronavirus cases has decreased more than 85% from its peak in January¹. The CDC has advised that fully vaccinated adults can now forgo masks both outdoors and inside, and vaccines are readily available for anyone, aged 12 and up, who wants one. With this in mind, we urge you to immediately reopen all federal offices and facilities, and require federal employees to return to the office and get back to work serving the American people.

Across the country, many Americans have safely returned to in-person work, school and public events, and many city and county offices have fully re-opened. Unfortunately, federal offices have not followed suit. Most federal agencies continue to allow staff to work remotely, cutting them off from the technologies, data and resources necessary to fully serve hard working Americans. While remote work was necessary during the darkest days of the pandemic, the need to remain at home is no more. Shuttered federal offices and properties are having an impact on individuals, families, and communities' abilities to make a full return to normal life.

Federal agencies' remote work policies have done more than limit in-person meetings and appointments, they have substantially diminished the ability of the staff at most federal agencies from accessing all resources and forms of communication with the people who need their assistance. This lack of access has had a disproportionate impact on the elderly, low-income individuals and people with disabilities. For more than a year, our staffs have served as the liaison between constituents and federal agency staff. Too many times our staffs have been told that agency personnel do not have access to physical mail, certain servers for data collection and voicemails left on office phones, leaving concerns unanswered and assistance undelivered.

The impacts of the situation are real. Farmers are busy planting spring crops and must soon report planted acres to local Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices. The Social Security Administration (SSA) is requiring people to mail important, personal documents to staff instead of providing them in person, forcing people to be without driver's licenses and other forms of identification for weeks at a time. Staff at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), working remotely, have been severely limited in the account information they have access to, affecting people's ability to contest fraudulent unemployment claims, resolve issues with returns, or speak directly to an IRS agent about their tax issues.

¹ https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailytrendscases

The impacts of the federal government's continued remote work policy extend to businesses and local economies. Shuttered United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) offices and diminished staff at the agency have substantially slowed the processing of paperwork and applications of immigrant labor, leaving many farmers and ranchers without the personnel necessary to keep their facilities operational. The nearly 14-month closure of presidential libraries and museums across the country have forced closures of local businesses and put a substantial dent in local economies that rely on the visitors drawn by these national attractions.

For more than a year, Americans have worked through ad hoc systems and alternative forms of communication to connect with federal agency staff. We cannot allow this unproductive method of doing business to continue. The vaccine is here, the pandemic is ending and it is now time for federal agencies to get back to the office and resume serving the American public.

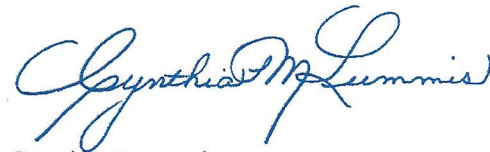
Sincerely,



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



Bill Hagerty
United States Senator



Cynthia Lummis
United States Senator



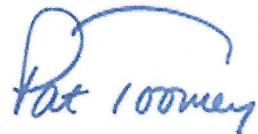
Rob Portman
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Patrick Toomey
United States Senator



James Inhofe
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator

CC:

Shalanda Young, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget
Kathleen McGettigan, Acting Director, Office of Personnel Management