



# SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

May 7, 2021

The Honorable Bill Cassidy  
Committee on Finance  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cassidy:

I want to take this opportunity to update you about the status of our labor relations. We are building collaborative working relationships with our union partners. As current AFGE union leadership noted in the press, I inherited a contentious management/union relationship going back decades that took the focus away from public service. We value the union's perspective, and are engaging them in good faith.

Consistent with President Biden's Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce (EO 14003), our labor strategy is informed by what we refer to as the three Cs: compliance with the labor statute, compromise as we enter negotiations with an open mind, and civility even when we are on the receiving end of hostile communications. For many years, agency experts have led our labor relations. However, recognizing the benefit of new viewpoints, in February 2021, we selected an experienced labor expert who was new to the agency, to run our Office of Labor-Management and Employee Relations. This change brings a fresh perspective to our union engagement. I am seeing progress.

Since this change, we increased official union time by thousands of hours for two of our unions, offered to renegotiate all Collective Bargaining Agreement articles with one of our unions, successfully bargained mid-term agreements with all three unions, and engaged on a variety of other workplace matters. For example, we engaged in post-implementation bargaining of our COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan—we could not delay safety measures like the requirement for masks and physical distancing—and have already reached agreement with one union. Over the last two months, we have completed six deals—a testament that we are willing to work together. Most recently, we reached a successful pre-implementation agreement with AFGE for our vulnerable population liaison program, which will help us improve service to the most vulnerable populations we serve and provide career enhancing opportunities for our employees.

We are fully committed to implementing EO 14003 in a responsive and responsible manner. In all areas requiring discretion in implementation, we are exercising discretion in accordance with the clear intent of EO 14003 and prudent management principles. We conducted a careful and objective review at a pace and in a manner commensurate with the size and complexity of our labor agreements.

I hold our employees in high regard. They help millions of people every year. I want to hear ideas from the union on how we can support them. I believe there are areas where we can compromise, and we will discuss those through the labor relations process. However, as I am sure you will agree, we must guard against outcomes harmful to public service. We all accept these government jobs knowing that the public must come first. As you recognize, we are already dealing with some in-office service challenges because we have properly prioritized employee and public safety. Working together is the best way forward, and I urge you to encourage the unions to continue engaging in meaningful dialogue with management that includes a focus on the very best service to the public.

Our Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs will be reaching out to your staff to schedule a briefing to provide a detailed update on our labor relations progress and implementation of EO 14003. If you have any questions, I would be happy to discuss our progress with you, or your staff may contact Eric Skidmore, the Deputy Commissioner for Legislation and Congressional Affairs, at (202) 358-6030.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Saul", written in a cursive style.

Andrew Saul  
Commissioner