



July 15, 2020

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly
Chairman
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
Subcommittee on Government Operations
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6143

Dear Chairman Connolly:

We are in receipt of your letter of June 15, 2020, requesting that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) examine the plans and procedures of the U.S. Department of Commerce (the Department) for returning employees to federal offices in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, and your staff's follow-up communication of July 9, 2020, requesting acknowledgement of receipt and a timeframe for response.

We have sent a memorandum to the Department (enclosed), dated July 14, 2020, requesting information on its approach to managing the workforce during the pandemic. Our July 14, 2020, memorandum looks to the White House and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines¹ and the Office of Management and Budget² as the basis for the reopening process, references our own observations of the Department, and incorporates the priorities set forth in your June 15 letter as a framework for inquiry. We have requested that the Department respond to our memorandum by July 28, 2020, and we will forward that response to you. In addition, our office will evaluate the Department's response and determine any appropriate follow-up action, including requesting clarification or additional information.

We share your concerns about the health and safety of the federal workforce in relation to reopening plans. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these issues in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 482-4661.

Sincerely,

Peggy E. Gustafson
Inspector General

Enclosure

¹ White House. *Guidelines for Opening Up America Again* [online]. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/> (accessed June 28, 2020).

² Office of Management and Budget, April 20, 2020. 'Aligning Federal Agency Operations with the National Guidelines for *Opening Up America Again*,' M-20-23. Washington, DC: OMB.

Enclosure.
OIG Memorandum to the Deputy Secretary of Commerce, dated July 14, 2020



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Office of Inspector General
Washington, D.C. 20230

July 14, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR: Karen Dunn Kelley
Deputy Secretary

FROM: 
Peggy E. Gustafson
Inspector General

SUBJECT: Request for Information Pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as Amended

On June 15, 2020, the U.S. Department of Commerce (the Department) initiated Phase I of the three-phased framework set forth in *Guidelines for Opening Up America Again*,¹ promulgated by the White House and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and referenced in Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-20-23, 'Aligning Federal Agency Operations with the National Guidelines for *Opening Up America Again*.'² I am aware that the Department has convened a working group that has assisted in developing practices and procedures for managing the Department's employees and facilities during the coronavirus pandemic, which has included the drafting and presentation of a handbook³ and video.⁴ I am also aware that the U.S. Census Bureau has developed a dashboard to assist the Department and its bureaus in making decisions regarding reopening.

In order to assist the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in its oversight of the Department, please transmit to my office the following information by July 28, 2020:

- Baseline metrics used and methodology supporting those metrics to inform decisions regarding office and facility reopenings, including the number of employees who contract the coronavirus.
- Compliance framework for phased reopening—for example, how the Department will assess adherence to occupancy limits, mask wearing, social distancing, disinfecting, and other measures described in the *Handbook for Reopening the Herbert C. Hoover Building (HCHB)*.

¹ White House. *Guidelines for Opening Up America Again* [online]. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/> (accessed June 28, 2020).

² Office of Management and Budget, April 20, 2020. 'Aligning Federal Agency Operations with the National Guidelines for *Opening Up America Again*,' M-20-23. Washington, DC: OMB.

³ U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Facilities and Environmental Quality, June 9, 2020. *Handbook for Reopening the Herbert C. Hoover Building (HCHB)*. Washington, DC: DOC OFEQ.

⁴ DOC. *HCHB Reopening: How You Can Be Prepared to Come Back* [online]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9uFkTf-aRQ&feature=youtu.be> (accessed June 17, 2020).

- Actions the Department has taken to ensure employee access to appropriate resources, including reliable coronavirus tests, personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, soap and warm water, workplace dividers, and disinfectant.
- Departmental protocols for when an employee tests positive for coronavirus.
- A description of inter-agency and inter-department cooperation—for example, with the CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to ensure that reopening plans are consistent with public health and worker safety guidelines.

In addition, you may also produce any additional documentation or information deemed relevant to this request.

Further, you are obligated to cooperate with this request. Department Administrative Order 213-2, § 4.03 states that “[i]t is Department policy that all employees fully cooperate with the OIG so that each inspection and evaluation may be promptly conducted and brought to an appropriate conclusion,” and that “Departmental officials shall make every effort to assist the OIG in achieving the objective of effective inspections and evaluations.” Similarly, Department Organization Order 10-13, § 4.01 states that “[t]he officers and employees of the Department shall cooperate fully with the officials and employees of the OIG and shall provide such information, assistance, and support without delay as is needed for the OIG to properly carry out the provisions of the [Inspector General] Act [of 1978].”

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (202) 482-4661.