



Assistant Secretary Castillo
Economic Development Administration
United States Department of Commerce
Herbert C. Hoover Building
Washington, DC 20230

May 28, 2024

Dear Assistant Secretary Castillo,

On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 3810, we are writing to bring to your attention the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the elected and officially recognized representation of labor at the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and EDA leadership. We, as a Local, meet regularly to identify common issues affecting labor at EDA and, in turn, raise them to leadership during our Labor Management Council (LMC) meetings. We have traditionally appreciated the role of the LMC in presenting an opportunity to directly voice the concerns of EDA employees to leadership, but we feel that labor's voice has diminished significantly. While AFGE Local 3810 continues to consistently attend these meetings with nearly all of its officers, EDA leadership's attention to this important effort has significantly waned.

As a result, we feel that our input into critical Agency matters is not taken seriously and, perhaps, not even conveyed to leadership both at EDA and the Department of Commerce. We have continuously expressed that the Agency's "return-to-office" policy will result in increased turnover and seriously jeopardize the Agency's ability to function, yet conversations on how to best address our concerns have completely stalled. EDA continues to lose critical staff to other organizations that provide telework options, and recent survey results from our members paint a picture of an agency on the brink of collapse. These statistically significant and representative findings include the following:

- Fewer than half of respondents said that their workload felt manageable.
- More than half of respondents are actively applying for positions outside of EDA.
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents would accept a job outside of EDA if offered.

The Agency is rapidly approaching a staffing level inconsistent with its current workload. This is not only due to the gross mismanagement of federal monies at the Agency leadership level that resulted in mass layoffs but also due to the Agency leadership's inability to retain staff. As you know, President Biden issued Executive Order 14119 – Scaling and Expanding the Use of Registered Apprenticeships in Industries and the Federal Government and Promoting Labor-Management Forums in March of this year. This executive order instructs agencies to "allow employees and their union representatives to have pre-decisional involvement in workplace matters, including...discussions with leadership for the development of joint solutions to workplace challenges," among other critical things. In concert with this directive, we request a significant reorientation of leadership's current posture towards engaging with AFGE Local 3810 through the LMC meetings.

Specifically, we request that you, Assistant Secretary Castillo, personally begin attending these meetings and continue to do so until the quality of dialogue at the LMC meetings returns to a level deemed acceptable by Local 3810's officers. We also request to bargain a memorandum of understanding that covers all aspects of the agency's proposed "return-to-work" policy, including telework, remote work, and other issues. Finally, we would like to jointly request alongside EDA leadership the assistance of a Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services mediator to help reestablish a healthy relationship.

As a reminder, these issues have been raised multiple times by Local 3810 in prior LMCs as well as in individual conversations between Local 3810 officers and representatives of EDA leadership to no resolution or even update. This includes a conversation that occurred on April 23, 2024, between EDA Deputy Assistant Secretary and Chief Operating Officer Ben Page and Local 3810 President Darrin Fleener. To provide sufficient background to the conversations we as officers have had with representatives of EDA leadership, we are prepared to provide you with the recorded minutes from previous LMC meetings upon request. Please note that AFGE Local 3810, with support from AFGE and AFL-CIO national leaders, will not hesitate to file an unfair labor charge against EDA with the National Labor Relations Board if we are unable to achieve the aforementioned goals within a reasonable timeframe.

Morale at EDA is at perhaps its lowest point ever, but non-leadership employees continue to successfully carry out their responsibilities due to one simple reason: we believe in it. Unfortunately, the incredible victories we have been able to accomplish together since you joined EDA are in serious jeopardy due to the current relationship between AFGE Local 3810 and EDA leadership. We sincerely hope you consider working more closely with us on these critical issues, as the Agency's ability to carry out its mission depends on it.

In solidarity,

Officers of AFGE Local 3810