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COMMITTEES
ARMED SERVICES
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June 27, 2024

The Honorable Paul K. Martin
Inspector General
U.S. Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Inspector General Martin,

On August 28, 2023, I asked you to review telework, physical space utilization, and locality pay policies at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

In your January 11, 2024, response, you stated your office takes timecard abuses and locality pay issues “very seriously.”¹ Yet, you declined to initiate a comprehensive review of USAID’s remote work practices due to the agency’s “evolving posture remote work, telework, and hybrid work over the past three years,”² despite USAID’s requirement that employees report to their official worksites at least six days per two-week pay period has been in effect since the end of Fiscal Year 2023.³

You should need no reminder that there is certainly ongoing locality pay fraud at USAID. As your recent investigation revealed, not only did a GS-13 employee falsely use an office supply retailer’s mailing address in Virginia to defraud the taxpayer by receiving higher Washington, D.C. locality pay while living in Florida full-time, she did so *with the full knowledge and assistance of her supervisor*.⁴

As I am sure you would agree, just one manager knowingly facilitating timecard fraud is too many. Further, reasonable minds would agree it is flatly implausible, at best, to suggest this GS-13 and her supervisor are the only employees engaging in this sort of fraud. At the very least, I would hope your office reviewed the agreements of all other employees under this supervisor’s purview to determine if they are also defrauding the taxpayer.

¹ Letter from USAID Inspector General Martin to Senator Joni Ernst. Available at https://www.ernst.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_usaid_oig.pdf.

² Id.

³ Federal News Network Staff, *Here’s What We Know So Far About Agencies’ Return-to-Office Plans*, Federal News Network (Dec. 2023), <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2023/12/heres-what-we-know-so-far-about-agencies-return-to-office-plans/#return-to-office-list>.

⁴ Office of the Inspector General, USAID, *Investigative Summary: Findings of Improper Locality Pay, Violations of the Telework Policy, and Lack of Candor*, (2024), <https://oig.usaid.gov/node/6787>.

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Nonetheless, you clearly must re-evaluate your decision and imminently launch a full-scale, comprehensive review of these issues at USAID.

This cannot become another instance where the USAID Office of the Inspector General (OIG) shields the agency from negative findings,⁵ especially when there is ample evidence of wrongdoing. USAID's choice to phase in its return to normal operations should have no bearing on your decision to wait before conducting what is clearly much-needed comprehensive oversight.⁶

Across the federal government, those Inspectors General whose offices evaluate this issue are uncovering rampant locality pay fraud, fueled by telework arranged without sufficient guardrails or oversight. Of note, when the Office of the Inspector General of the Architect of the Capitol analyzed its locality pay practices, it found a full 80 percent of sampled employees received incorrect locality pay.⁷ In a second recent audit, the Department of Commerce OIG found roughly a quarter of employees were improperly overpaid because they got the wrong locality pay.⁸

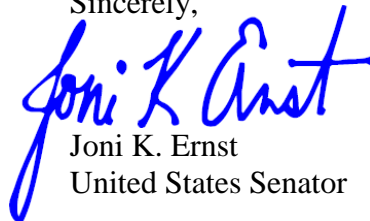
Proactive steps must be taken to verify the accuracy of locality pay determinations, payroll, and personnel management. Accordingly, I urge you to reconsider whether it is truly too soon to review telework and remote work issues.

To assist me in my oversight work, please answer the following questions as soon as possible but no later than July 11, 2024:

1. Will you commit to engaging in the full, comprehensive review you declined to do in January? If not, why not?
2. What was the cost to taxpayers of the GS-13 USAID employee falsely reporting their residence to receive a higher locality pay?
3. What actions were taken to hold the complicit supervisor accountable?
4. In light of the recent steps the General Services Administration (GSA) took to reduce its footprint by 3.5 million square feet, saving taxpayers \$1 billion, and the recent finding from the Public Buildings Reform Board that the USAID headquarters has an occupancy rate of 26 percent in its Washington, D.C. headquarters,⁹ what actions, if any, should USAID take to address its underutilization? Does your office view this underutilization as a problem? If not, why not?

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me or my staff, at 202-224-3254.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

⁵ Scott Higham & Steven Rich, *Whistleblowers Say USAID's IG Removed Critical Details from Public Reports*, Washington Post (Oct. 22, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/whistleblowers-say-usaids-ig-removed-critical-details-from-public-reports/2014/10/22/68fbc1a0-4031-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f_story.html.

⁶ Id. at 4.

⁷ Office of the Inspector General, Architect of the Capitol, *Evaluation of Locality Pay for Remote Employees*, (2024), <https://www.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/oig-reports/AOC/AOC-Locality-Pay-Remote-Employees.pdf>.

⁸ Office of the Inspector General, Department of Commerce, *The Department Can Improve Processes to Ensure Locality Pay Is Accurate* (2024), <https://www.oig.doc.gov/OIGPublications/OIG-24-025-A.pdf>.

⁹ Public Buildings Reform Board, Interim Report to Congress (2024), <https://www.pbrb.gov/files/2024/03/3.21.24-FINAL-PBRB-Interim-Report.pdf>.