



U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD

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Chairman

February 14, 2011

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Financial Services and General Government
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 charged the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) with protecting and promoting the merit principles to ensure a fair, effective and efficient government. MSPB has carried out this charge by providing superior adjudication services to Executive branch departments and agencies, by enforcing its decisions, and by conducting high-quality, cost-effective merit studies. While MSPB performs these tasks with an extraordinary sense of commitment to the civil service, it does not excuse itself from the challenge of internalizing and implementing its own rulings and merit systems recommendations. Likewise, it does not claim exemption to the guidance and protocols issued as generally accepted practices by the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies that are charged with the administration of government.

For these reasons, shortly after my appointment as Chairman in November 2009, I directed the agency to conduct in-depth reviews and assessments of its mission, planning, fiscal, programmatic, and administrative functions to collect an initial read on the agency's strengths and weaknesses. From these reviews came a significant overhaul of the agency's operations and culture, producing new strategic and performance plans, a new resources management plan (in development), ongoing improvements in mission effectiveness, and an engaged workforce with an emphasis on performance and transparency. Much of this work was done in anticipation of, but prior to the passing of the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010, which stresses the importance of accountability and results-driven performance.

To reinforce the internal operational and cultural changes, MSPB created its first vision statement that embraces the ideals of *Excellence, Fairness, Timeliness and Transparency*. The agency also modernized its mission statement to encompass its full statutory mission of protecting merit and promoting an effective workforce free of Prohibited Personnel Practices.

This reconnection to our statutory and Congressional intent was accompanied by an open-door policy with our stakeholders to help them overcome the ‘mystery’ behind the process. Our stakeholders – consisting of government and non-government organizations – welcomed these efforts. Strong buy-in was evident through the outpouring of candid feedback and their participation in the agency’s first oral arguments in 24 years, the first Government in the Sunshine Act meeting on the merit systems studies agenda in more than a decade, and by energetic town hall meetings with practitioner and government groups.

Additionally, MSPB established strict new internal processes to increase executive accountability and align the strategic, performance, and resources management plans to include workforce/succession planning and formal program evaluation. Most of these operational and organizational changes have occurred at little or no additional cost. Additionally, cost-cutting exercises are now part of regular business will continue, increasing the savings already realized over the past year.

Initial reviews have uncovered budgetary shortfalls that require attention. The lack of a full appreciation of these identified budgetary deficiencies has taken its toll on the agency in formerly subtle ways that are now emerging as larger, long-term concerns. The source of these shortages centers on a past budget process that focused on annual activity rather than long-term strategic goals backed by performance. As a result, contingencies and out-year business needs were not sufficiently considered, and have led to delays in hiring, cancellations of workforce investment projects, and stressed program performance.

This budget request is designed to present the FY 2012 cost of annual operations and agency development and contingencies under two general themes: the Congressional Budget Justification based on current services, and a small correction to annual operational expenses to assist the agency with overcoming its shortages. The modifications the agency seeks are intended to instill permanent, best practices that will lay the foundation for MSPB to bring value to the Government through protecting and promoting merit.

The MSPB does not underestimate the gravity of the current fiscal environment internal and external to government, nor does it take lightly its request for a correction. Rather, it is because of this realization that the agency seeks to exercise its independent authority to articulate its future and to directly account for its past actions, a state of affairs of the agency’s own making. Therefore, within this budget request and in much greater detail, we respectfully request \$46,186,000 and 235 FTE.

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On behalf of the dedicated men and women who proudly serve their country in the unique capacity that MSPB allows, thank you for your consideration of our request. I am available for your inquiries and have dedicated the resources of the Executive Director, Steve Lenkart, for the same.

Respectfully,



Susan Tsui Grundmann

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member