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MSPB RECOMMENDS ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF FAVORITISM AND ENSURING MERIT-BASED DECISIONS

A new report from the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), [*Preserving the Integrity of the Federal Merit Systems: Understanding and Addressing Perceptions of Favoritism*](#) reinforces the need for Federal agencies to understand and address employee perceptions of personal favoritism. Favoritism—granting an advantage to an employee or applicant based on personal feelings or relationships, rather than merit-based criteria—is contrary to statutory merit system principles that require Federal agencies protect employees against personal favoritism, hire solely on the basis of relative ability, and base rewards and retention on job performance.

Results of the Federal Merit Systems Survey conducted for this study reflect continuing concern among Federal employees that personnel decisions, from day-to-day work assignments to selections for promotion, are affected by favoritism. Notably, 28 percent of employees indicated that their own supervisor had engaged in favoritism within the past two years, and 53 percent of employees believed that favoritism had influenced the decisions of other supervisors in their organization.

MSPB's report discusses three different reasons for perceptions of favoritism: intentional favoritism, unintentional favoritism, and employee misperceptions of a reasonable, merit-based decision. Federal agencies should address *all* of these reasons, because employee perceptions of favoritism can seriously undermine employee morale and productivity, regardless of their cause. "Avoiding the fact and appearance of favoritism is especially important in today's environment, as personnel decisions, from hiring to recognition, receive heightened scrutiny," explains Chairman Susan Tsui

Grundmann. “Supervisors must take special care to base their decisions on agency needs and merit-based criteria, rather than personal relationships or personal preferences. For their part, employees should seek information on the factors that supervisors consider when allocating opportunities and awards, and request and act on developmental feedback so they are well-positioned to compete and succeed on their merits.” The report outlines steps that Federal agency leaders and supervisors can take to ensure that decisions are merit-based and untainted by personal favoritism and discusses what Federal employees can do to help them successfully compete for advancement and recognition in a merit system.

MSPB is an independent, quasi-judicial agency that protects the merit system principles and promotes an effective Federal workforce free of prohibited personnel practices. MSPB adjudicates appeals, conducts studies of the merit systems, and reviews the rules, regulations, and significant actions of the Office of Personnel Management. MSPB studies are available on the web at www.mspb.gov/studies.