

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 30, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Robin Carnahan
Administrator
General Services Administration

Dear Administrator Carnahan:

On May 22, 2023, we wrote you requesting information relating to the occupancy data of federal office space owned and leased by the Government Services Administration (GSA) to better inform the American people and Congress on whether federal employees are returning in-person to federal workplaces paid for by taxpayer dollars. After three months since transmitting the letter, GSA has failed to respond. That is unacceptable and illustrates GSA's contempt for the American people.

Since we last wrote you, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released additional data on the utilization of federal office space for the 24 federal agencies that occupy 98% of all federal real property.¹ GAO found that 17 of the 24 federal agencies used an estimated 25% or less of their headquarters buildings capacity during the three-week period they examined in 2023.² Moreover, six of these agencies (Department of Agriculture, Department of Housing and Urban Development, General Services Administration, Office of Personnel Management, Small Business Administration, and Social Security Administration) used less than 10% of their headquarters' office space.³ After the release of GAO's analysis, it was reported

¹ Government Accountability Office, *Preliminary Results Show Federal Buildings Remain Underutilized Due to Longstanding Challenges and Increased Telework*, GAO-23-106200 at 1-2 (Jul. 13, 2023) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106200.pdf> (the federal agencies surveyed included the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Agency for International Development, General Services Administration, National Science Foundation, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Office of Personnel Management, Small Business Administration, and Social Security Administration).

² *Id.* at 7-8 (the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Agency for International Development, General Services Administration, National Science Foundation, Office of Personnel Management, Small Business Administration, and Social Security Administration used an estimated 25% or less of their headquarters buildings capacity).

³ *Id.* at 8.

that the Biden administration told Cabinet officials to “aggressively execute” plans for federal employees to return to in-office work.⁴

As federal employees continue to work from home, millions of Americans have returned to the office or didn’t have the luxury of working from home in the first place.⁵ As we stated in our previous letter, GSA is responsible for managing federal agency leases that total roughly \$5.7 billion in annual rental costs.⁶ In addition, federal agencies spend about \$2 billion each year to operate and maintain federal office space.⁷ GSA releasing occupancy data to the public will provide needed transparency into whether federal employees are returning to the federal workplace and which federal agencies are potentially wasting millions in taxpayer dollars on leasing and paying utilities for empty office space.⁸ Accordingly, when will GSA release that data to the public?

The COVID emergency is over.⁹ It is far beyond time for federal employees to return to the workplace, and taxpayers have a right to know that the office space they pay for is being used.¹⁰ In order for Congress to conduct objective and independent oversight concerning the occupancy of federal office buildings and its effect on taxpayer dollars, provide answers to the following questions raised in our May 22, 2023 letter.

1. Why won’t GSA make the number of federal employees who report to federal office space in-person publicly available?
2. Provide a list of each GSA managed federal building and the Department or agency occupying the property. For each federal building in each of the past five years, for each month provide the number of federal employees housed at the

⁴ Landon Mion, *President Biden pushing for federal employees to return to the office*, Fox News (Aug 9, 2023) <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/president-biden-pushing-federal-employees-return-office>.

⁵ Gwynn Guilford, *Work-From-Home Era Ends for Millions of Americans*, WSJ (Mar. 25, 2023) <https://www.wsj.com/articles/work-from-home-era-ends-for-millions-of-americans-8bb75367>; Gretchen Ertl, *They Never Could Work From Home. These Are Their Stories*, NY Times, (Sept. 22, 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/22/business/never-remote-workers-covid.html>; Tara Law, *Americans Are Being Encouraged to Work From Home During the Coronavirus Outbreak. For Millions, That's Impossible*, Time (Mar. 9, 2020) <https://time.com/5797382/coronavirus-remote-work-home/>.

⁶ Government Accountability Office, *Federal Real Property: GSA Could Further Support Agencies' Post-Pandemic Planning for Office Space Use*, GAO-22-105105 (Sep. 7, 2022) at 10, 24 <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105105>; GSA, *Fact Sheet: What is Occupancy Data*, (Jan. 2022) <https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/PBS%20Resources%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Daily%20Occupancy%20Data%20FINAL%2001-2022.pdf> (stating GSA has begun collecting daily occupancy data from their tenant federal agencies and through badging data of employees entering GSA managed buildings).

⁷ Federal Buildings Remain Underutilized, *supra* note 1 at 10.

⁸ Alexander Nazaryan, *Americans are paying billions for empty government offices*, Yahoo! News (Aug. 2, 2023) <https://news.yahoo.com/americans-are-paying-billions-for-empty-government-offices-181334141.html>.

⁹ Julia Musto, *Biden signs bill ending COVID-19 pandemic national emergency*, Fox News (Apr. 11, 2023) <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-signs-bill-ending-covid-pandemic-national-emergency>.

¹⁰ See Lauren Sforza, *Millions of Americans stopped working from home in 2022: Labor Dept.*, The Hill (Mar. 26, 2023) <https://thehill.com/business/3919102-millions-of-americans-stopped-working-from-home-in-2022-labor-dept/> (reporting that 72% of private sector establishments reported little to no telework among its employees in 2022).

property,¹¹ the average daily occupancy rate, the lowest number of federal employees that reported to the building, and the highest number of federal employees that reported to the building.

3. For each federal building listed in Question 2, provide the annual rental, operation, and maintenance costs for each of the past five years.
4. According to the January 2022 GSA factsheet, GSA used its own occupancy data that it collected to “successfully consolidate 2,000 people from six leased locations in the Washington, DC metro area to [GSA] headquarters building” which saved taxpayers \$24 million in annual rent cost, \$6 million in annual administrative costs, and a 50% reduction in energy consumption.

For each of the six previously leased GSA locations in each of the past five years, for each month please provide the number of federal employees housed at the property, the average daily occupancy rate, the lowest number of federal employees that reported to the building, the highest number of federal employees that reported to the building, and the annual rent, operation, and maintenance cost.

In addition, provide answers and the data with respect to the following no later than September 6, 2023.

1. For each of the 24 federal agency headquarters referenced in the July 13, 2023, GAO study, in each of the past five years, provide for each month the number of federal employees housed at the property, the average daily occupancy rate, the lowest number of federal employees that reported to the building, and the highest number of federal employees that reported to the building.
2. For each federal building listed in Question 2, provide the annual rental, operation, and maintenance costs for each of the past five years.

Thank you for your prompt review and response. If you have any questions, please contact our committee staff.

Sincerely,

¹¹ This is defined as the total number of full and part time employees who are permanently assigned to the building; seasonal hires, interns, and other temporary staff if they predominantly work in the building and are employed for three months or longer; and individuals who telework less than five days a week but are permanently assigned to the location.



Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator