

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 22, 2023

**VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION**

The Honorable Robin Carnahan  
Administrator  
General Services Administration

Dear Administrator Carnahan:

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has reported that federal agencies have made few changes within their federally leased space since the COVID-19 emergency, and they collect very limited data on how many employees report in-person to federal offices.<sup>1</sup> In surveys conducted in July 2021 and April 2022, GAO found that 20 of the 24 federal agencies surveyed, including GSA, either did not collect or collected limited space utilization data concerning how many federal employees worked in office buildings as indicated by a combination of electronic badging, sensors, and other technologies.<sup>2</sup> GSA collected this data from “approximately one percent” of the 7,700 federal leases it manages and from “approximately eight percent” of 1,699 federally owned buildings.<sup>3</sup> The GAO report states that GSA would begin collecting additional data about space utilization in 2022.<sup>4</sup>

A January 2022 GSA factsheet on daily occupancy data states that GSA’s Public Building Service had begun collecting anonymous building entry information from its tenant agencies and through physical building access cards to better understand how the increase in telework and virtual teaming due to COVID-19 has changed the utilization of office space.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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>; see, Mike Dorning, *Washington Suffers as Federal Employees Work From Home*, Bloomberg (Mar. 9, 2023) <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2023-03-09/wfh-federal-employees-have-republicans-some-dems-demanding-return-to-office> (“Cushman & Wakefield, a commercial real estate firm, compiled keycard data from the General Services Administration and concluded that only 5% of the prepandemic federal workforce had swiped-in to a government-leased office on an average workday in October and November... The GSA, in an emailed statement, disputed the accuracy of the 5% figure but said it was unable to provide attendance data.”)

<sup>2</sup> GAO-22-105105, *supra* note 1 at 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 24

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> GSA, *Fact Sheet: What is Occupancy Data*, (Jan. 2022) <https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/PBS%20Resources%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Daily%20Occupancy%20Data%20FINAL%20001-2022.pdf> (“Daily occupancy data does not include any Personally Identifiable Information (PII). The data PBS collects and analyzes only includes anonymous building entry information over a selected period of time.”).

GAO reported that GSA has no plans to publicize current or future federal building occupancy data that it collects.<sup>6</sup> This is unacceptable. News reports indicate that Washington, D.C, which has the largest concentration of federal employees in the country, lags behind other large metro areas in employees return to the workplace since the COVID-19 emergency.<sup>7</sup> Federal building occupancy data would better inform the American people and Congress on how federal office space, paid for by taxpayer dollars, is utilized. After all, it is the American people's money that support these federal buildings.

GSA is responsible for managing federal agency leases that total \$5.7 billion in annual rental costs.<sup>8</sup> The public availability of the number of federal employees who report in-person to the office will provide needed transparency into whether the taxpayer is getting the most bang for their buck. Federal agencies that use taxpayer money to lease and maintain buildings must utilize the space they are paying for. No taxpayer should have to front the bill for federal agencies to heat and air condition, replace lightbulbs, and take out unused trash bins in empty buildings.<sup>9</sup> The COVID-19 emergency is over, federal employees cannot work from home forever and must return to office space the taxpayer pays for, or we need to get rid of the unused office space.<sup>10</sup>

In order for Congress to conduct objective and independent oversight concerning the utilization and occupancy of federal office buildings and the costs to the taxpayer, please answer the following and provide the requested data no later than June 5, 2023.

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 property,<sup>11</sup> 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.

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<sup>6</sup> GAO-22-105105, *supra* note 1 at 27-28.

<sup>7</sup> Dorning, *supra* note 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> See Nick Robertson, *Biden Administration Urges Return to Office for Federal Workers*, The Hill, (Apr. 14, 2023) <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/3950271-biden-administration-urges-return-to-office-for-federal-workers/>.

<sup>10</sup> See WaPo. Editorial Board, *Scaling Back Remote Work at Federal Agencies is a Long Overdue Step*, The Washington Post (Apr. 18, 2023) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/04/18/federal-agency-remote-work-policy/>.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

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.<sup>12</sup>

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.

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

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Budget



Roger F. Wicker  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>12</sup> GSA Fact Sheet, *supra* note 5.