

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 11, 2024

Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20415

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to express my strong support for the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)'s proposed rule (RIN: 3206-AO69 - "Prevailing Rate Systems: Change in Criteria for Defining Appropriated Fund Federal Wage System Wage Areas) to consolidate Federal Wage System (FWS) wage areas within General Schedule (GS) locality pay areas.

For years, hourly employees at some federal facilities across the country have been compensated according to different pay scales—and, in effect, paid less—than their salaried colleagues, despite the fact that they work in the very same buildings. This pay disparity between FWS and GS employees is inequitable and unfair, and it has shortchanged thousands of union workers across Pennsylvania for too long.

My office has heard directly from employees, union representatives, and management at federal facilities across the commonwealth about the difficulties that this disparity poses to many aspects of their operations, including recruitment, retention, and employee morale. Due to the disparity, these facilities are losing talent to nearby public and private sector employers that offer more competitive wages. This is threatening our federal workforce's ability to deliver for the American people, plain and simple.

At Tobyhanna Army Depot in northeastern Pennsylvania, for example, retirement has historically been the driving force behind the facility's attrition rates. Now, as a direct result of this pay disparity, the majority of wage grade workers leaving the depot aren't retiring, they're leaving to take jobs at other facilities where they won't be getting screwed on pay. But this isn't just the case at Tobyhanna – we're hearing similar stories across the commonwealth.

At United State Penitentiary Canaan, management can't fill authorized FWS positions across multiple departments, and they're seeing qualified workers transfer to other federal facilities where the pay disparity doesn't exist. Letterkenny Army Depot and Defense Logistics Agency New Cumberland are experiencing similar difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled workers, and they're seeing too many experienced employees leave our federal workforce altogether for nearby opportunities in the private sector. I've also heard from FWS workers at Gettysburg National Military Park who are earning \$4.15 per hour less than they should because of this outdated system. This means \$332 less in these workers' pockets per pay period, \$8,300 less per

year, and, over the course of a 20-year career, \$166,000 less for their savings and retirement. We don't need to wonder why we're losing hardworking federal employees across the country – this pay disparity alone is wreaking havoc on our federal workforce.

But the truth is that this proposed rule is about so much more than just a paycheck. It's also deeply rooted in the Biden Administration's commitment to the dignity of work. Our FWS workers are not less than their GS colleagues and our federal pay system shouldn't treat them as such. Finalizing this rule would demonstrate our collective commitment to uplifting every federal worker, including the FWS and union workers who keep these federal facilities and our communities running.

As OPM and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) consider the comments and data submitted in response to this proposed rule as published in the *Federal Register*, I urge you to consider the following from Federal Prevailing Rate Advisory Committee (FPRAC) member Paul O'Connor: "There is a cost to adopting these recommended changes – there's also a cost if we don't." Both Congress and the agencies affected by the proposed rule have had decades to listen and gather the facts needed to make this long overdue change. It's clear that the status quo isn't working for federal agencies or our federal workforce – now is the time to address it.

Thank you for your attention to these comments. Should you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Fetterman', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and 'F'.

John Fetterman
United States Senator