

January 15, 2019

The Honorable Margaret Weichert  
Acting Director  
Office of Personnel Management  
1900 E Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Acting Director Margaret Weichert,

I am writing to you with some urgency regarding health insurance coverage for furloughed federal employees. Today, January 15, 2019, the President's shutdown of the federal government has entered its 25th day – the longest in the history of the United States. My constituents in Oregon and I are increasingly concerned there may be no end in sight.

As uncertainty and confusion continues to grow among the some 800,000 federal employees furloughed without pay, it has been brought to my attention that some of my constituents are receiving conflicting information about whether coverage through the Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) program will continue during the shutdown. This issue is of particular concern for federal employees and their family members with preexisting conditions, especially preexisting conditions exacerbated by exactly the sort of stress this shutdown is causing.

Although both the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)<sup>i</sup> and insurance carriers<sup>ii</sup> have publically stated the shutdown should not affect FEHB coverage for furloughed federal employees, my constituents and federal employees across the country are still receiving conflicting information concerning this. They deserve thorough and transparent answers regarding the shutdown's effects or potential effects on their health insurance, and they deserve those answers now.

- (1) Are federal employees guaranteed to receive coverage through the FEHB program while on furlough due to the government shutdown?
- (2) Is OPM proactively notifying employees and providers of the status of coverage during the shutdown?
- (3) How are you working with insurers offering FEHB plans to ensure continuous coverage during the shutdown?
- (4) If a FEHB beneficiary is denied coverage at any point during the shutdown, what is your plan for addressing and rectifying such a scenario?
- (5) When an agreement is reached to end the shutdown, how will you ensure FEHB beneficiaries have clear information about the premium owed for the period of time an employee was furloughed?

I am troubled by the seemingly endless impacts of the partial government shutdown affecting federal workers in Oregon and across the country. I look forward to your response to this letter in a manner that could be made public to furloughed federal employees within 5 days.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>i</sup> FEDWeek. January 2, 2019. "OPM Issues Status on Benefits During Shutdown." <https://www.fedweek.com/issue-briefs/opm-issues-status-update-on-benefits-during-shutdown/>

<sup>ii</sup> National Public Radio. January 11, 2019. "Most Federal Workers' Health Coverage To Continue During Shutdown, Even If Pay Stops." <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/01/11/683770812/most-federal-workers-health-coverage-to-continue-during-shutdown-even-if-pay-sto>