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NTEU Responds to Next Round of IRS Employee Call Backs

PRESS RELEASE | June 4, 2020

Washington D.C. – The IRS has informed the National Treasury Employees Union that it is planning to recall employees into work sites in multiple states over the next four weeks.

After IRS employees in Utah, Texas and Kentucky started reporting back to their buildings this week, the next wave is scheduled to report June 15 in Michigan, Georgia, Missouri and Tennessee, which includes the large campuses in Atlanta and Kansas City.

Employees in California, Indiana, Ohio, Puerto Rico and Oregon, including the large campus in Fresno, are due to report on June 29.

The IRS Commissioner announced the call backs to employees in a message Wednesday night.

Not all frontline workers in those states will be recalled. Employees who are currently teleworking will continue to do so, according to the IRS. And those who are considered a medical high risk also do not have to return to their work stations and will either continue to telework or remain on administrative leave. Finally, the IRS intends to limit the recalls so they can ensure proper physical distancing between employees in the workplace.

NTEU is awaiting information from the IRS about how many employees it intends to call back for each location and business division.

“We understand that the IRS has a backlog of important work that cannot be done remotely and they need to restart systems as soon as possible, but our concerns about the coronavirus pandemic have not changed,” said NTEU National President Tony Reardon. “Employees remain anxious about the risks posed by taking public transportation, being in enclosed facilities with hundreds of coworkers and whether their work stations will be consistently and properly cleaned and disinfected.”

NTEU has requested an update on the cleaning protocols and the supplies of hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and masks, although employees may choose to bring their own masks.

“We still believe that the federal government can do more to protect workers by broadening testing capabilities and screening employees upon their arrival at the work site,” Reardon said. “Since March we have urged the IRS to consider moving all tax filing deadlines to Oct. 15, which would give the agency and employees more time to address the backlog of work and accommodate necessary safety precautions.”

NTEU has asked the IRS to find better alternatives for those employees with young children who may not have access to their regular child care services such as schools, summer camps or day care. Right now, those employees will be asked to use their personal leave to be able to care for their children, which is not a sustainable solution. Instead, we've asked the IRS and the Office of Personnel Management to consider options such as administrative leave, split shifts, job sharing, part-time schedules or other flexibilities.

"This week's return of workers in three states, in addition to those who have already volunteered to return, will test the safety of the IRS' recall plans," Reardon said. "IRS employees are among the more than 105,000 Americans who have died of COVID-19 and we want to prevent any further losses by proceeding with extreme caution."

NTEU represents 150,000 employees at 33 federal agencies and departments.

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