

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ilhan Omar (MN-05)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

FECA Reform and Oversight: Prioritizing Workers, Protecting Taxpayer Dollars

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, everyone, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

The *Federal Employees' Compensation Act*, or FECA, is more than just a compensation statute—it is a solemn promise. A promise that if a federal worker is injured on the job, we as a government will make them whole. It's a commitment not only to those who wear a uniform or work on the front lines, but to every civilian federal employee—from postal workers to TSA agents to those inspecting our food supply and maintaining public safety. These individuals do their jobs with dedication, and we must ensure they are protected when they're injured doing that work.

Unfortunately, in the broader landscape of workers' compensation, we've seen a troubling trend. Years of regressive changes in many states have weakened employee compensation systems, leaving too many workers behind at their moment of greatest need. FECA stands as one of the last strongholds of a worker-first compensation model, and we have a responsibility to preserve and strengthen it, not dismantle it in the name of cost savings or efficiency.

Historically, this Committee has shown that FECA reform doesn't have to be partisan. In fact, some of the most significant improvements to the program have been made through bipartisan cooperation. We've demonstrated that when we put politics aside and focus on the mission—supporting federal workers—we can deliver meaningful change. That legacy is worth continuing. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, but we can modernize the vehicle. That means updating outdated procedures, improving access to care, and ensuring injured workers don't fall through the cracks during the claims process.

With bipartisan work already underway, including the *Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act*, from Chairman Walberg and Representative Courtney, this work must be continued. But let me be clear: any changes to FECA must be driven by one question—*how does this help workers?* The conversation must be centered on listening to workers. Too often, decisions about federal workforce policy are made without real engagement with those directly impacted. We need to hear from the workers navigating the claims process, the physicians providing care, and the families who face financial insecurity when benefits are delayed. Their experiences must guide our reforms.

To help us understand the importance of strengthening FECA, I want to share two stories from my home state of Minnesota. In November 2020, a postal truck was hit by a speeding SUV, causing the truck to flip over. The letter carrier was found unconscious. He suffered numerous injuries, including a broken wrist, torn ACL, broken chest bone, internal bleeding, and a concussion. Since the incident, he has had Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and a cognitive communication deficit. Sadly, he will never be able to work again. However, it is only due to FECA that his medical treatment is covered, and he and his family receive a steady cash benefit that, while it falls

short of the paycheck he once earned, nevertheless is a lifeline for them. This is why FECA matters, because when tragedy strikes, that's what stands between a lifetime of hardship and a measure of dignity.

Now more than ever, we must remember that federal workers aren't just serving the government. They are serving all of us. And so, at the very least, they deserve FECA, which is far and worthy of the services they provide to the public. The tireless and often fearless dedication of our federal workers has a real-world impact on the safety and well-being of our communities.

Just last week, I had the privilege of honoring a letter carrier from my district in Saint Louis Park, whose name is NALC's 2025 national hero of the year for saving a person trapped in a burning car. This is only one example of public service that emanates from our federal workforce and is exactly why our government must be committed to protecting them as they are protecting others. Because when our federal workers know they will be treated fairly and supported in time of injury and illness, it builds the type of stability that strengthens not only the workforce but also the quality and deliver public services that millions of Americans rely on every day.

Now, I know we'll hear concerns about cost efficiency. And of course, we all want to use tax dollars responsibly. But the smartest, most cost-effective thing we can do is invest in workplace safety. Fewer injuries and illnesses mean fewer claims and lower long-term costs. That's why prevention matters—like the proposed OSHA heat stress rule—isn't just good policy, it's common sense.

Prevention is always cheaper than treatment. And when workers have the training, equipment, and protections they need, everyone benefits. Productivity goes up, injury rates go down, and public trust in our institutions are strengthened.

This shouldn't be a partisan issue. It's about dignity. It's about fairness. It's about whether we value the people who put in the work every single day to serve this country. When they get hurt, they shouldn't be pushed into poverty. They shouldn't have to jump through hoops to get the care and compensation they have earned. And they certainly shouldn't be treated as liabilities or line items—these are human beings with families, careers, and futures that depend on our decisions in this room.

We owe it to our workforce and the public to maintain a system that reflects our values: fairness, compassion, and respect for those who serve. And we owe it to this institution to pursue those values in a bipartisan way, building on past reforms with a renewed focus on the people who are the foundation of our government's daily operations. So, I hope that's what today's hearing will reflect—a real commitment to protecting workers, not cutting corners. A willingness to improve FECA not by weakening its promise, but by strengthening the support it offers.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.