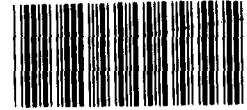


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THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PERSONNEL ACT
MOBILITY PROGRAM

Statement of
Bernard L. Ungar, Director
Federal Human Resource Management Issues
General Government Division

Before the Subcommittee on Human Resources
Committee on Post Office and Civil Service
House of Representatives



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THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PERSONNEL ACT MOBILITY PROGRAM
SUMMARY OF STATEMENT

BY

BERNARD L. UNGAR
DIRECTOR, FEDERAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The primary purpose of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970 was to improve federal-state-local government cooperation by strengthening the personnel capabilities of state and local governments. In the early 1970s, federal agencies used the mobility program primarily to send personnel to state and local governments. Since about 1975, however, agencies have used the program primarily to bring personnel into the federal government from colleges and universities. This is allowed under the act and the agencies have found this approach to be beneficial. Because the present program's character differs considerably from that originally envisioned by Congress, GAO believes that Congress may wish to reassess and clarify the primary purpose of the mobility program.

OPM has exercised minimal guidance and oversight of the mobility program since 1982, when OPM limited its involvement with all programs authorized by the 1970 act. GAO has made recommendations to OPM to improve its oversight of the program.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the Subcommittee's hearings on the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) mobility program. We have reviewed the mobility program and yesterday we provided our report to Chairman Ted Weiss of the Subcommittee on Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations, Committee on Government Operations. We will provide that report for the record and briefly summarize its main points.

The act allows personnel to be assigned temporarily between federal agencies and various nonfederal organizations. The assignments are to be mutually beneficial to the participating organizations, and costs are to be shared accordingly. Over the past 5 fiscal years, the number of agreements made by federal agencies grew from about 550 in fiscal year 1984 to about 800 in fiscal year 1988.

We reviewed the act's legislative history to find out what Congress wanted to accomplish through the mobility program and gathered data from 36 departments and agencies on how they were actually using the program. We also did work at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on its overall management of the program.

In brief, we found that the program is used widely in the federal government and is generally considered to be very beneficial across the government. However, the program's character has changed considerably since 1970. Since about 1975, the program has become primarily a way to bring college and university personnel into the federal government. OPM has assigned the mobility program a low priority in terms of its resource commitment to the program since 1982, when it reduced its involvement in all IPA activities.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL PURPOSE IS

NO LONGER EMPHASIZED

The act is clear as to what Congress originally intended for the various programs IPA created in 1970. The intent was to strengthen the personnel resources of state and local governments and encourage intergovernmental cooperation. Our work showed that this original purpose has become secondary to bringing personnel into the federal government from colleges and universities. The overall data that we accumulated illustrate how the program's direction and emphasis have shifted from sending personnel to state and local governments to bringing college and university personnel into federal agencies over the years and how the program is generally being used today:

-- Over the past 5 years (fiscal years 1984-1988) about 2 of every 10 assignment agreements were made with state and local governments, in contrast to about 6 out of every 10 in the 1970s.

-- Colleges and universities have become the most frequent nonfederal participants since the early 1970s, accounting for about 70 percent of the 4,000 agreements made by federal agencies in the past 5 years and supplying about 90 percent of the people coming into the federal government under the program during this period.

-- Federal agencies typically are the principal beneficiaries of the assignment and they generally pay most or all of the assignment cost (mostly salaries and fringe benefits.)

The act permits agencies to bring college and university personnel into the federal government and to pay any or all of the cost involved. However, the predominate use of the mobility program in this manner, in comparison to Congress' original intent, led us to conclude that Congress may want to reassess and clarify the primary purpose of the mobility program.

OPM GUIDANCE AND OVERSIGHT

OPM has reduced the number of staff assigned to administer and oversee the program, and there has been little governmentwide direction, oversight, and guidance given to the program in recent years. OPM has not evaluated the program and reported to Congress since about 1980.

OPM also has not always asked for or received the information it needs from agencies to effectively monitor the program. Assignment agreements and annual evaluation reports, which OPM requires from agencies for monitoring the mobility program, were not always submitted. For example, at the time of our review in March 1989, OPM had received reports from only 11 of 36 agencies that had made assignment agreements in fiscal year 1988. OPM was not aggressive in obtaining these documents from agencies and in following up questions about possible improper use of mobility assignments. We also found that the agencies did not have consistent policies for obtaining financial disclosure reports from nonfederal personnel assigned to the agencies under the program.

We believe that OPM could do a better job with its current priorities and resource commitment, and we made recommendations to that end. Specifically, OPM needs to

--better control the information it requires from agencies for monitoring the mobility program,

--direct agencies to make timely corrections or terminations of any improper assignments, and

--specify the circumstances in which nonfederal personnel assigned to federal agencies under the program should file financial disclosure reports.

In addition, there are broader questions that Congress and the Administration may want to consider in the context of the overall purpose the mobility program is to serve: namely, how aggressive OPM should be in monitoring the program, what staffing priority OPM should give the mobility program, and whether OPM should periodically provide reports on the program to Congress.

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That concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.