

United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Requesters

October 2014

FEDERAL PAID ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE

Additional Guidance Needed to Improve OPM Data

GAO Highlights

Highlights of GAO-15-79, a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies have the discretion to grant paid administrative leave for a variety of reasons, such as weather closures and blood donations. While paid administrative leave costs taxpayers, it has not been reviewed or reported on extensively.

GAO was asked to examine the use of paid administrative leave. This report (1) describes paid administrative leave policies at selected federal agencies; (2) reviews practices in recording and reporting paid administrative leave and describes the number of federal employees granted such leave, and the amount and associated salary costs of such leave; and (3) describes categories for which large amounts of paid administrative leave have been charged by individual employees at selected federal agencies.

To determine the total amount of paid administrative leave, GAO analyzed fiscal year 2011 through 2013 payroll data from OPM's Enterprise Human Resources Integration system. To review agency policies and reasons for using large amounts of administrative leave, GAO selected five agencies based in part on the percentage of employees with higher-than-average amounts of such leave.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OPM develop agency and payroll provider guidance regarding the recording and reporting of paid administrative leave. OPM partially concurred agreeing to clarify guidance to agencies and payroll providers, but said it could not direct agencies on how to collect such data. GAO continues to believe the recommendations are valid.

View GAO-15-79. For more information, contact Yvonne D. Jones at (202) 512-2717 or jonesy@gao.gov.

FEDERAL PAID ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE

Additional Guidance Needed to Improve OPM Data

What GAO Found

Policies. Agencies have the authority to grant paid administrative leave—an excused absence without loss of pay or charge to individual leave—and to set policies governing its use. Among the five agencies GAO reviewed—the Departments of Defense (DOD), the Interior, and Veterans Affairs (VA); the General Services Administration; and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—agency policies and guidance contained several common activities for granting paid administrative leave (such as voting and blood donations). However, variations exist, depending on agency mission and how leave is categorized in agency policy. For example, USAID and DOD officials said that they grant paid administrative leave for rest and recuperation to employees serving 6 months or more in Afghanistan, while the other selected agencies did not.

Recording and Reporting Practices. GAO found inaccuracies in Office of Personnel Management (OPM) data due to (1) differences between agencies' leave recording practices and what OPM officials consider paid administrative leave; and (2) differences in what payroll providers report to OPM as paid administrative leave. For example, VA employees record all authorized official time for union activities as paid administrative leave in the agency's time and attendance system. In addition, one payroll provider includes federal holidays as administrative leave when reporting the data to OPM. OPM officials said that, in both instances, they would not expect such absences to be recorded as administrative leave. These variations occur because OPM has not provided guidance on what agencies should record and has provided limited guidance on what payroll providers should report as paid administrative leave. Such guidance could help agencies better manage the federal workforce.

Amounts and Costs. After separating federal holidays from the payroll data, OPM-reported data showed that from fiscal year 2011 through 2013, paid administrative leave accounted for less than 1 percent of total paid work days and estimated salary cost. Over these 3 years, about 97 percent of employees charged 20 days or less (see figure). For the same time period, 263 employees charged between 1 and 3 years of paid administrative leave, with an estimated salary cost of \$31 million.

Large Amounts. Agency officials stated that the most common reason for which selected employees charged amounts relatively higher than the agency average, was for personnel matters, such as investigations into alleged misconduct.

Employees Charging Paid Administrative Leave Government-wide Fiscal Years 2011-2013 Number of employees (97%) (3%) 1,200,000 944,441 1,000,000 800.000 600,000 388,946 385 970 400,000 155,252 200.000 53,055 2.997 746 275 263 1 day or less 2 to 5 days 6 to 10 days 11 to 20 days 1 to 3 3 to 6 6 to 9 months 9 to 12 months 1 to 3 months months years Total amount of paid administrative leave granted to federal employees

Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management's Enterprise Human Resources Integration payroll data. | GAO-15-79 Note: Reflects workdays (5 days per week, about 21 days per month, and 260 days per year).

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Abbreviations	
CFO Act	Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990
CPDF	Central Personnel Data File
DOD	Department of Defense
EHRI	Enterprise Human Resources Integration
FLRA	Federal Labor Relations Authority
FPM	Federal Personnel Manual
GSA	General Services Administration
HR LOB	Human Resources Line of Business
Interior	Department of the Interior
MSPB	Merit Systems Protection Board
NFC	National Finance Center
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
State	Department of State
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs

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U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

441 G St. N.W. Washington, DC 20548

October 17, 2014

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley Ranking Member Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate

The Honorable Tom A. Coburn, M.D. Ranking Member Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs United States Senate

The Honorable Darrell Issa Chairman Committee on Oversight and Government Reform House of Representatives

The federal government has different types of leave for employees to use when they are away from the workplace. These types of leave include annual leave, sick leave, leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, donated leave under the voluntary leave transfer program, military leave, and paid administrative leave. Federal agencies have the discretion to authorize paid administrative leave-an excused absence without loss of pay or charge to leave-for a variety of reasons, including closures for severe weather and blood donations. Paid administrative leave is a cost to taxpayers. If it is used for a large number of government employees (such as when major snowstorms and hurricanes force the closure of federal government offices) or for extended periods of time (such as when an employee is placed on paid administrative leave for several months pending a conduct-related investigation), this cost could be substantial. Furthermore, neither the government-wide cost nor the frequency and total amount of paid administrative leave granted to federal employees have been reviewed or reported on extensively.

In light of this, you asked us to examine the use of paid administrative leave. In this report, we (1) describe policies for paid administrative leave at selected federal agencies; (2) review agencies' and payroll providers' practices in recording and reporting paid administrative leave, and describe the number of federal employees granted such leave, the total number of days granted, and the associated salary costs; and (3) describe categories of reasons for which large amounts of paid

administrative leave have been charged by individual employees at selected federal agencies.

To determine the extent and total amount of paid administrative leave, we analyzed payroll data between fiscal years 2011 and 2013 from the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Enterprise Human Resources Integration (EHRI) system.¹ EHRI contains payroll data and other information for most federal civilian employees in more than 100 federal agencies, including employees of the 24 agencies covered by the Chief Financial Officers Act, which represent the major departments (such as the Department of Defense) and most of the executive branch workforce.²

We estimated the salary cost of these hours using actual employee salaries, where available, and average agency salary when employee salaries were unavailable. We tested the reliability of the OPM EHRI payroll data and concluded that they were sufficiently reliable for our purposes. However, the data have limitations. First, the data represent charges to several types of leave and other activities that vary across agencies, and data were aggregated into a single category of paid administrative leave. Since these aggregated charges do not include the same activities across all agencies, the data are not comparable across agencies. Second, the reasons for the charges to paid administrative leave are not specified in the data, so it is not possible to compare the amount of paid administrative leave time charged with the reasons for which the time was charged. Finally, due to the differences in the types of activities and circumstances for which agencies authorize administrative leave, the charges may or may not include time when employees were participating in activities directly related to their job responsibilities.

To describe the policies for paid administrative leave and categories of reasons why selected employees were granted extended amounts of such leave, we selected five federal agencies—the Departments of Defense, the Interior, and Veterans Affairs; the General Services Administration; and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

¹The EHRI system was being implemented prior to fiscal year 2011 and these data were not as complete due to fewer agencies reporting their payroll data to OPM. Therefore, we did not use data prior to fiscal year 2011.

²EHRI is the primary government-wide source for information on federal employees. The EHRI data we analyzed cover executive branch civilian employees, with some exclusions, and limited legislative branch employees. See appendix I for further detail.

Agency selections were based upon two factors: (1) the percentage of employees at each agency with amounts of paid administrative leave that were relatively higher than each agency's average; and (2) the agency's average amount of administrative leave per employee. For these agencies, we reviewed leave policies and time and attendance guidance for granting and recording paid administrative leave, respectively, and interviewed agency officials at the selected agencies, at the four payroll service centers used by the selected agencies, and at OPM. Also, at the selected agencies, we collected reasons for which selected employees charged large amounts of paid administrative leave. To select employees, we first identified those employees charging administrative leave in amounts relatively higher than the average amount of charges made at each agency.³ From that subset of employees, we selected a nongeneralizable sample which included employees with the highest total amounts of paid administrative leave, as well as employees randomly selected from the remaining employees with large amounts of administrative leave. For a more complete description of our methodology, see appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from November 2013 to October 2014 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

There is no general statutory authority for the use of paid administrative leave, which is an excused absence without loss of pay or charge to leave; however, we, as well as OPM and others, have provided direction in the permissible use of administrative leave.

Regulations Addressing Administrative Leave

OPM regulation. In the absence of statutory authority to promulgate regulations addressing administrative leave for all executive agency employees, OPM has addressed the use of paid administrative leave in

³We defined "relatively higher" as paid administrative leave charges in excess of three standard deviations from the agency mean.

limited contexts in regulations, such as those regarding other types of leave, excused absences for federal wage employees, and personnel matters. Examples include:

- Brief tardiness. In describing minimum charges for sick and annual leave, OPM provides that if an employee is unavoidably or necessarily absent for less than one hour, or tardy, the agency, for adequate reason, may excuse the employee without charge to leave.⁴
- Federal wage employees. In implementing the statute which authorizes employees paid on daily, hourly, or piece-work basis to be paid for days they are prevented or excused from working, OPM regulations address excused absences for Federal Wage System employees, and certain other employees (e.g. those paid on a daily or piece-work basis), stating that granting up to 3 consecutive workdays of administrative leave may be appropriate when warranted.⁵
- Adverse actions. OPM addresses the limited use of administrative leave in its regulations on the procedural requirements for removing or suspending employees.⁶ Specifically, in discussing an employee's entitlement to at least 30 days' advance written notice of a proposed action, OPM provides that while it is presumed that an employee will remain in a duty status during the advance notice period, in "rare circumstances" where the agency determines the employee's presence in the workplace may pose a threat to the employee or others, result in loss of or damage to government property, or otherwise jeopardize legitimate government interests, the agency may elect from one or a combination of alternatives, including placing an

⁶5 U.S.C. §§ 7513(a) and 7514. 5 C.F.R. §§ 752.404(b)(3) and 752.604(b)(2) (for Senior Executive Service). These regulations apply to a removal, suspension for more than 14 days, reduction in grade or pay, and a furlough of 30 days or less.

⁴5 C.F.R. § 630.206.

⁵5 C.F.R. part 610, subpart C. Appropriate circumstances include (1) interruption of normal operations beyond the control of management or employees, (2) establishment closing for a short period for managerial reasons, (3) it being in the public interest for employees to participate in civil activities which the government is interested in encouraging, or (4) circumstances are such that an agency would excuse the absence of employees paid on an annual basis. These regulations implement 5 U.S.C. § 6104, which authorizes employees paid on a daily, hourly, or piece-work basis to be paid for days they are prevented or excused from working because of a holiday or other authorized reason.

employee on administrative leave for such time as necessary to effect the action.⁷

Guidance and Legal Decisions	OPM guidance. While it has not addressed administrative leave in broad contexts through regulations, OPM has provided additional guidance to agencies on the use of administrative leave via government-wide memorandums, handbooks, fact sheets, and frequently asked questions. In this guidance to agencies regarding exercising their discretion to use administrative leave, OPM provides that the use of administrative leave should be limited to those circumstances in which the employee's absence is not specifically prohibited by law and satisfies one or more of the following criteria: (1) it is directly related to the agency's mission, (2) it is officially sponsored or sanctioned by the head of the agency, (3) it will clearly enhance professional development or skills of the employee in his or her current position, or (4) it is brief and determined to be in the interest of the agency. ⁸
	OPM guidance has acknowledged numerous purposes for which administrative leave is appropriate—as recognized by executive order or policy, or our decisions. Typically, these purposes are work related or civic in nature and include voting ⁹ and registering to vote, civil defense activities, blood donations, taking examinations required by the employee's position, and attending conferences or conventions. ¹⁰ OPM has also sanctioned granting excused absence to employees who are prevented from reporting to work (or are faced with a personal
	⁷ Other options include assigning the employee to duties where the employee is no longer a threat, allowing the employee to take leave (or carrying the employee in an appropriate leave status if employee has absented him or herself from the workplace without requesting leave), or curtailing the notice period as authorized under 5 U.S.C. § 7513(b) when the agency has reasonable cause to believe that the employee has committed a crime for which imprisonment may be proposed.
	⁸ See for example, OPM, Fact Sheet: Guidance on Scheduling Work and Granting Time Off to Permit Federal Employees to Participate in Volunteer Activities, and Frequently Asked Questions Work Life: Can an agency grant time off for fitness activities?
	⁹ See OPM, memorandum <i>Excused Absence for Voting</i> , October 31, 2008.
	¹⁰ OPM's guidance used to be found in its Federal Personnel Manual (FPM) until FPM was abolished in 1993. See Federal Personnel Manual, Chapter 630, Subchapter 11, <i>Excused Absence</i> , Sept. 23, 1991. Earlier versions of FPM included representing employee organizations as an appropriate purpose for using administrative leave until Congress created "official time" under the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. See, 5 U.S.C. § 7131.

emergency) because of severe weather or other emergency situations. More recently, OPM has strongly encouraged agencies to permit telework-ready employees to telework in such situations, thereby maintaining the continuing operations of the federal government.¹¹

OPM also issued guidance on granting administrative leave in response to presidential direction. For example, in response to a 2003 presidential directive to provide 5 workdays of excused absences to employees returning from active military duty in support of the Overseas Contingency Operations, OPM issued guidance to agencies on how to properly implement this directive.¹²

OPM has also incorporated the use of administrative leave into guidance on various topics, including workplace violence. In discussing short-term administrative options available in removing a potentially dangerous employee from the workplace, OPM advises that while conducting further investigation and deciding on a course of action, placing an employee on excused absence is an immediate, temporary solution to the problem of an employee who should be kept away from the worksite.¹³

OPM is also responsible for settling federal employee leave and compensation claims and issuing decisions to agency officials on such matters. We had performed this function until it was transferred to OPM in 1996.¹⁴

Our decisions. We have issued numerous decisions on the permissible use of administrative leave. Our decisions recognize that in the absence of a generally applicable statutory or regulatory framework authorizing

¹¹OPM, Washington, D.C. Area Dismissal and Closure Procedures, December 2013.

¹²The Overseas Contingency Operations is formerly known as the Global War on Terrorism. See OPM, *Fact Sheet: 5 Days of Excused Absence for Employees Returning from Active Military Duty.*

¹³OPM also suggests detailing the employee to another position if there is another position where the employee can work safely and without disturbing other workers.

¹⁴Our claims settlement function under 31 U.S.C. § 3702 for federal employee compensation and leave claims was transferred to OPM pursuant to section 211 of the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act of 1996, effective June 30, 1996. See Pub. L. No. 104-53. The related authority under 31 U.S.C. § 3529 to render advance decisions to agency officials settling these claims was transferred to the head of OPM by the General Accounting Office Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-316, effective October 19, 1996.

administrative leave, agencies have the discretion to grant brief periods of administrative leave.¹⁵ However, our decisions have found granting administrative leave for lengthy periods of time is inappropriate unless it is in connection with furthering a function of the agency.¹⁶

Under a range of situations, our decisions have addressed the appropriate usage of administrative leave. In the context of official travel, we have recognized several circumstances in which administrative leave may be granted, including brief periods of acclimatization rest following travel,¹⁷ in connection with a transfer,¹⁸ and in connection with extended temporary duty to attend training.¹⁹

A number of our decisions have addressed the use of administrative leave during the investigation of an employee or in the context of taking an adverse action against an employee. For example, to process an employee's suspension (where it was in the interest of the government to have the employee off the job), we approved of placing the employee on administrative leave during an investigation for wrongdoing for the short time needed (24 hours or so).²⁰ However, under circumstances when it

¹⁷56 Comp. Gen. 629 (1977) and 55 Comp. Gen. 510 (1975).

¹⁸Administrative leave for one week to manage move of residence was permissible, even though transfer was ultimately cancelled. B-180693, May 23, 1974. Administrative leave for 40 hours for a house-hunting trip prior to transfer (in lieu of reduction-in-force) was permissible even though the reduction-in-force was cancelled and the employee chose to remain in his position. B-246646, Apr. 30, 1992.

¹⁹One day of administrative leave may be granted to employees so they may find suitable housing while attending training. B-192258, Sept. 25, 1978.

²⁰38 Comp. Gen. 203 (1958). At the time this decision was issued, suspensions for 30 days or less did not require 30 days advance notice as is the case now for suspensions of more than 14 days or indefinite suspensions.

¹⁵44 Comp. Gen. 333 (1964).

¹⁶See 67 Comp. Gen. 126 (1987) which found that granting administrative leave to an employee for 3 days a month to participate in therapeutic cancer research trial is permissible; 63 Comp. Gen. 542 (1984) where, in promulgating agency policy on permitting employee support to the federal credit union, we suggest establishing appropriate time limits on granting administrative leave for such efforts, such as, not to exceed 4 hours in any one day; not to exceed 3 workdays; or not to exceed 40 working hours in a calendar year; and 61 Comp. Gen. 652 (1982) deciding that an employee involuntarily assigned to represent an indigent defendant may not be placed on administrative leave to carry out such responsibility given the indeterminate period in question, and that such effort would not be in furtherance of agency function.

would not be feasible to reassign the employee (or when information to initiate an adverse action against the employee was insufficient), we concluded that an agency's proposed regulations were unauthorized where those regulations provided up to 45 days of administrative leave while investigating allegations of employee misconduct.²¹

Administrative tribunal decisions. The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) has recognized the authority of agencies to place employees on short-term administrative leave while instituting adverse action procedures.²² However, the Board has found settlement agreements unenforceable where, under its terms, the agency was to place the employee on administrative leave for extended periods of time.²³

MSPB has also ruled that placing an employee on administrative leave is not subject to procedural due process requirements and is not an appealable agency action.²⁴ This is in contrast to agency actions, such as removals or indefinite suspensions, which require procedural due process (such as 30 days advance notice), and are subject to appeal and reversal by MSPB where agencies fail to follow such due process procedures.²⁵ Similarly, where an agency bars an employee from duty for more than 14 days, requiring that employee to use his or her own leave (or placing

²⁴Dixon v. United States Postal Service, 69 M.S.P.R. 171 (1995) (placement on administrative leave with pay is not an appealable agency action), citing *Henry v.* Department of the Navy, 902 F.2d 949 (Fed. Cir. 1990) (since employee was provided full pay while placed on administrative leave during the notice period of her proposed removal, there was no adverse action from which the employee could appeal to contest her placement on administrative leave).

²⁵See 5 U.S.C. §§ 7513 and 7702(c)(2).

²¹B-189773, Nov. 3, 1977.

²²See, Brown v. United States Postal Service, 64 M.S.P.R. 425, 431 (1994).

 ²³*McDavid v. Department of the Army*, 46 M.S.P.R. 108 (1990) (employee to be placed on administrative leave for a 3-month period) and *Miller v. Department of Defense*, 45
M.S.P.R. 263 (1990) (Board concurred with our advice (provided under B-236124, Jan. 2, 1990) and concluded the settlement agreement was unlawful as it awarded employee 1 year of administrative leave).

	them in a non-pay status), such agency actions are also subject to appeal. ²⁶
	The Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) has also addressed the use of administrative leave in some of its decisions. In a recent case, FLRA reaffirmed its controlling precedent that agency discretion to grant administrative leave is limited to granting brief, occasional, or sporadic periods of administrative leave. ²⁷
OPM Collects Payroll Data	Payroll data. In 2004, OPM began to integrate federal civilian employee
on Administrative Leave	payroll and personnel data into a single data warehouse—the Enterprise Human Resources Integration (EHRI) system—as one of several efforts supporting OPM's Human Resources Line of Business (HR LOB) initiative. HR LOB intended to help transform the way human capital functions and services are carried out in the federal government. The goal of HR LOB was to integrate and streamline human resources systems to improve government-wide human capital management by better informing policy making and more effectively managing the federal workforce. To collect the payroll data, payroll service providers for federal agencies report payroll data biweekly to EHRI. According to OPM officials, most payroll providers were reporting payroll data to EHRI by 2009.
	Time keeping. Federal employees generally use electronic time and attendance systems to record their work and leave time. These systems allow employees to record time spent on different work and leave activities, including paid administrative leave. However, the level of detail regarding the exact nature of the work or leave time varies depending on the agencies' systems for recording employee work time.
	²⁶ 69 M.S.P.R. at 175 (if employee was forced to use sick leave, annual leave, or leave without pay for a period exceeding 14 days, employee was subjected to a constructive suspension appealable to MSPB). See also, U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Information Sheet No. 11, <i>Enforced Leave</i> (Sept. 18, 2008).
	²⁷ See United States Department of the Air Force and Sport Air Traffic Controllers Organization, 65 F.L.R.A. 387 (2010) (granting 59 minutes of administrative leave at the

Organization, 65 F.L.R.A. 387 (2010) (granting 59 minutes of administrative leave at the end of an employee's shift where no air traffic operations were required was a permissible exercise of agency discretion and supervisory authority could not be unilaterally eliminated).

Payroll service. Federal agencies primarily use four payroll service providers to process employee pay and track work and leave hours.²⁸ These payroll providers process employees' time and attendance information and then report payroll data to OPM's EHRI system. These data are then used to populate OPM's EHRI data warehouse containing federal personnel and payroll information. EHRI has a single category for all paid administrative leave hours and the payroll service providers may aggregate various leave categories when preparing data on paid administrative leave to be transmitted to EHRI.

Selected Agencies Consistently Categorize Some Activities as Acceptable Reasons for Granting Paid Administrative Leave; However, Variations Exist

Selected Agency Policies and Guidance Commonly Categorize Some Activities for Granting Paid Administrative Leave

Policy similarities. Among the agencies reviewed, we found activities or circumstances which were consistently categorized as eligible for the granting of paid administrative leave in each of the agencies' leave policies and guidance. These included donating blood, dismissals due to hazardous weather or emergency conditions, physical examinations to determine fitness for duty, and voting and registration, among others (see table 1 below). In addition to civic activities and weather-related delays or closures, all agencies we reviewed also included at least one activity directly related to employees' job responsibilities as reasons for granting paid administrative leave. Examples of these activities included attending trainings, conferences, conventions, or meetings, and performing tasks necessary for change of duty station.

²⁸These four payroll service providers are the National Finance Center, General Services Administration, Interior Business Center, and Defense Finance and Accounting Services.

Table 1: Activities Commonly Categorized as Reasons for Granting Paid Administrative Leave by Number of Selected Agencies That Cited the Reasons

Cited in all 5 agencies' policies and guidance on paid administrative leave

Unavoidable or necessary absence and tardiness for less than 1 hour

Dismissals due to hazardous conditions (weather, civil disturbance, natural disasters)

Blood donation

Voting activities (registration and voting)

Required physical examinations such as those to determine fitness for active military duty

Veteran participation in funeral ceremonies for members of the U.S. Armed Forces (honor guard, pallbearer)

Cited in 4 of 5 agencies' policies and guidance on paid administrative leave

Examinations and interviews (civil service, internal promotions)

Personnel matters including investigations for alleged misconduct, security threats, criminal conduct, or adverse actions, among others

Change of duty station activities (packing, finding housing, travel)

Civil defense and disaster response activities (state guards, community programs)

Cited in 3 of 5 agencies' policies and guidance on paid administrative leave

Trainings, conferences, conventions, or meetings

Employee organization (union) activities such as negotiations, grievance and appeals, ongoing labor and management committees, or training for union representatives^a

Receiving counseling from agency officials or employee assistance program counselors

Rest periods during or following work-related travel

Parades and ceremonies (incentive award ceremonies, welcoming ceremonies for foreign dignitaries at the White House)

Agency-sponsored volunteer activities

Injury sustained while on duty - initial exam or treatment or for remainder of the day injury occurred

Local holidays (Mardi Gras, holidays observed exclusively overseas)

Bone marrow or organ donation

Returning from active military duty

Funeral leave (immediate relatives killed in line of duty, to attend funerals of fellow law enforcement or firefighters)

Source: GAO analysis of agency paid administrative leave policy and guidance. | GAO-15-79

Note: Reasons listed in table above were included in at least three of the five selected agencies' policies on granting paid administrative leave. Like reasons across agency policies were grouped together under some of the reasons listed above; examples provided may not be applicable to all agencies that grant paid administrative leave for the broader reason listed. For the Department of

Defense (DOD), agency officials provided us with subcomponent policies for review based on differences between the subcomponent policies and agency-wide policy. We reviewed policies on paid administrative leave for the following DOD subcomponents - Air Force, Defense Contract Management Agency, and Washington Headquarters Services-Serviced Components.

^aOne of the three agencies that grant paid administrative leave for union activities do so only for limited activities, such as training for union representatives.

Agencies Can Set Policies for Paid Administrative Leave; Therefore, Policy Differences Exist between Agencies

Agency discretion. Agencies have the discretion to grant paid administrative leave for brief periods of time and have exercised this discretion through setting policies governing the use of this type of leave. In some instances, agencies set policies to grant paid administrative leave to employees for reasons related to agencies' missions, or that are in the best interest of the agency. For example, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Department of Defense (DOD) officials said that they grant paid administrative leave to employees serving 6 months or more in Afghanistan for rest and recuperation breaks, while other selected agencies did not. In addition, some agencies may allow paid administrative leave to be granted for physical fitness activities. as an agency employee-wellness initiative or for mission-related reasons. For example, the Air Force allows installation commanders (or heads of serviced organizations) to excuse civilian employees for physical fitness activities—and to charge up to 3 hours of paid administrative leave per week-based on mission and workload requirements. Similarly, the Department of the Interior (Interior) allows employees to be granted paid administrative leave for health and fitness activities, but only under limited circumstances and not for regularly recurring periods (such as a set amount of time each week).

Categorization differences. While the five selected agencies consistently categorize some activities under their paid administrative leave policies (as described in table 1), we found that some agencies' policies categorize a specific activity as paid administrative leave while others do not. For example, four of the five agencies we reviewed categorize time to serve as a juror or witness (commonly referred to as court leave)²⁹ as separate from paid administrative leave; however, Interior policy classifies court leave as a reason for which employees can charge paid administrative leave (see figure 1). In another variation, we found that an agency subcomponent's policy categorized activities or circumstances as paid administrative leave while agency-wide policy categorized the activities or circumstances differently. For example,

²⁹5 U.S.C. § 6322.

according to Air Force policy, legal holidays are categorized as paid administrative leave. However, in DOD-wide policy, as well as other DOD subcomponents reviewed, legal holidays are not categorized under paid administrative leave.



Source: GAO anaylsis of selected agency leave policies. | GAO-15-79

Congressional authorization. Both court leave and legal holidays are examples of circumstances in which Congress has authorized excused absences for federal employees. Other instances of congressionally authorized excused absences include attending military, law enforcement, and firefighter funerals,³⁰ serving as a bone-marrow or organ donor,³¹ and

³⁰5 U.S.C. § 6326 authorizes 3 days of excused absence in connection with the funeral of an immediate relative who died while serving in the Armed Forces. 5 U.S.C. § 6328 authorizes excused absence for a federal law enforcement officer or a federal firefighter to attend the funeral of a fellow federal law enforcement officer or Federal firefighter, who was killed in the line of duty. Congress has also authorized an excused absence for veterans participation in funeral ceremonies for members of the U.S. Armed Forces under 5 U.S.C. § 6321.

³¹5 U.S.C. § 6327 provides up to 7 days of leave for bone-marrow donors and 30 days for organ donors.

recovery for employees injured by hostile action while serving abroad.³² Similarly, Congress has authorized official time to be used when engaging in union activities, such as negotiating collective bargaining agreements.³³ According to OPM officials, these congressionally authorized circumstances are not paid administrative leave, but rather separate types of leave or authorized absences. OPM officials said that they considered paid administrative leave to be an administratively authorized absence from duty. However, agencies we reviewed included congressionally authorized circumstances in their paid administrative leave policies.³⁴ We discuss below our assessment of OPM's payroll guidance and the extent to which it distinguishes between administrative leave and congressionally authorized excused absences.

Differences in Agency Leave Recording Practices and in Payroll Providers' Interpretation of Guidance Contributed to Large Variations in Reporting of Paid Administrative Leave

³²An employee may be absent due to an injury for up to 1 year. 5 U.S.C. § 6325.

³³5 U.S.C. § 7131. Activities that relate to internal union business may not be charged to official time, but rather they must be performed when in a nonduty status.

³⁴Some congressionally authorized excused absences were included in administrative leave policies for only one or two agencies that we reviewed, such as for employees injured by hostile action while serving abroad and court leave.

A Lack of Detailed Guidance Related to Recording and Reporting Paid Administrative Leave Activities Makes Data Comparison Challenging

Because agencies' policies on paid administrative leave differ, OPM data on administrative leave is expected to vary across agencies, even when controlling for agency size. However, we found large variations in OPM data on paid administrative leave as a result of (1) agency recording practices, and (2) differences in how payroll providers report time to EHRI. Agency practices for recording paid administrative leave included time for activities that OPM did not consider to be paid administrative leave. Similarly, when payroll providers reported data to EHRI, time for activities that OPM did not consider to be paid administrative leave were included. Furthermore, in one case, a payroll provider did not report any time for activities that OPM officials would expect to be reported as paid administrative leave, even though time for these activities was collected through the time and attendance system. OPM has not provided guidance to agencies on how to record time for paid administrative leave activities, and while OPM has provided guidance to payroll providers for reporting paid administrative leave hours, this guidance is limited.

Agency recording practices. Agency practices for recording activities as paid administrative leave in time and attendance systems vary from what OPM officials told us that they expected. In some instances, we found that time entered by employees as paid administrative leave may not all be considered as paid administrative leave by OPM officials. For example, as noted above, employees are to use official time when engaging in certain union and labor relations activities (e.g., negotiating collective bargaining agreements); however, some agencies record union and labor relations activities as paid administrative leave. At the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for instance, we found that official time for engaging in union activities were recorded as paid administrative leave because the agency's time and attendance system does not have a job code to capture official time separately.³⁵ In another example, a subcomponent of Interior instructs a certain group of employees-those not paid for specified vacation days but who are paid during this time as part of a prorated payment schedule-to record this time as paid administrative leave in the time and attendance system. Interior officials told us that the subcomponent did not have a separate code for recording this vacation time. Thus, the agency established the practice of recording it as paid administrative leave. OPM has not issued guidance on which

³⁵See GAO-15-9 (forthcoming) for more information on VA's and other agencies' use of official time activities.

activities employees should or should not record as paid administrative leave in agencies' time and attendance systems, which affects the accuracy and consistency of the data that OPM collects. Internal control standards state that agency management must have relevant, reliable information to effectively manage their organization and provide accountability for their operations.³⁶ In addition, internal control standards state that detailed policies, procedures, and practices are to be developed to ensure consistent implementation by responsible parties to achieve established objectives.³⁷ Without adequate guidance on what should or should not be recorded as paid administrative leave, federal employees and agencies cannot provide OPM with relevant and reliable information, which could be used to manage the federal workforce and inform human capital management policy.³⁸

Additionally, as mentioned previously, OPM officials told us that they do not consider any legislatively authorized activities, such as bone marrow or organ donation, funeral leave, or absence due to injuries sustained from hostile actions abroad to be paid administrative leave. However, we found that agencies do instruct employees to record these activities as paid administrative leave in their time and attendance systems. For example, DOD does not have a separate code for employees to record time spent for bone marrow or organ donation, but for several agency components, including the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force, it is included as one reason among many for charging paid administrative leave. Additionally. Interior instructs its employees to record court time as paid administrative leave, which does not align with what OPM officials consider to be paid administrative leave. By providing more detailed guidance, OPM could assist federal agencies in determining which activities should or should not be recorded as paid administrative leave, making this government-wide time and attendance data more consistent for monitoring the activities of the federal workforce.

Payroll provider reporting. OPM has provided a data codebook to payroll service providers to serve as guidance on reporting payroll data to

³⁶GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1 (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).

³⁷GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.

³⁸Office of Personnel Management, *Human Resources Line of Business: Integration Support Project,* (Washington, D.C., Feb. 20, 2009).

EHRI. This codebook includes instructions and technical specifications on the data elements that payroll providers should populate every 2 weeks. For example, the instructions include specifications for how each employee's data should be formatted in the file along with a listing of all data elements to report for each employee such as total salary, annual leave hours used, and amounts deducted for health benefits. However, this guidance is limited and we found that payroll service providers interpret it in different ways. For example, the OPM guidance document for reporting payroll data to EHRI does not provide any instructions for reporting federal holiday leave hours, and we found that payroll service providers report these hours either differently or not at all. One of the four primary payroll providers for the federal government-the National Finance Center (NFC)—includes federal holidays among the hours reported to OPM as paid administrative leave; the other three primary providers either report federal holidays as regular duty hours or do not report them at all.³⁹ NFC officials said that these charges are reported to EHRI as paid administrative leave for lack of another option because, according to OPM's guidance, there is no separate data element for federal holidays and regular duty hours should not include any paid leave. However, OPM officials told us that they do not consider federal holidays to be paid administrative leave. In addition, among the four primary payroll providers, three report other legislatively authorized leave activities such as court leave, official time, military leave, and bone marrow and organ donation as paid administrative leave.⁴⁰ These reporting differences result in inaccurate data on the total amount of paid administrative leave, and since OPM guidance does not define paid administrative leave by specifying what should and should not be reported in this category, these payroll providers include time for activities that OPM does not consider to be paid administrative leave. As illustrated below, while employees at USAID (which uses NFC) record federal holidays separate from paid administrative leave, when NFC reports USAID payroll data to OPM, federal holidays are included in the agency's paid administrative leave totals. In contrast, for the General Services Administration (GSA), which uses its own services as one of the four

³⁹The four primary payroll service providers are the National Finance Center, General Services Administration, Interior Business Center, and Defense Finance and Accounting Services. EHRI does not include a separate data element for federal holidays.

⁴⁰EHRI includes separate data elements for military leave, leave for organ donation, court leave, and leave for bone marrow donation, among others.

primary payroll providers, federal holidays are reported as regular duty time, not as paid administrative leave (see figure 2 for an illustration of how these hours are reported to EHRI).



Source: GAO anaylsis of Office of Personnel Management, General Services Administration, U.S. Agency for International Development, and National Finance Center information. | GAO-15-79

In another example, the Department of State (State) (which acts as its own payroll provider for submitting payroll data to OPM for all its employees) does not report any hours to OPM as paid administrative leave, even though the agency has a policy for granting paid administrative leave under several circumstances and records time for several activities in its time and attendance system as administrative leave.⁴¹ State officials explained that paid administrative leave is recorded as such in the time and attendance system, but recorded as regular duty time within the agency's payroll system. Officials stated that this is due to a system limitation that will be corrected with the implementation of a new payroll application in late 2015. As a result, all paid administrative leave is reported to OPM as regular duty time.

OPM officials explained that no quality review of the data has occurred and that they were not aware of the data discrepancies created by either NFC reporting federal holidays as paid administrative leave or by State not reporting any time as paid administrative leave. Consequently, the agency has not addressed these discrepancies to date. However, OPM officials told us that they intended to organize a working group in fiscal year 2015 to conduct an initial review of the quality of the EHRI payroll data. Similar to our 1998 assessment of the reliability of OPM's personnel data—which facilitated the data's use in numerous subsequent engagements—we have initiated work to review the reliability of OPM's EHRI payroll data.⁴² The payroll data assessment is expected to be completed in fiscal year 2016, and will include following up on the status of OPM's working group.

As described above, EHRI payroll and personnel data are collected to assist OPM and agencies in managing the federal workforce and resources more effectively. However, because OPM has not provided detailed guidance to ensure the consistency and accuracy of data reported to EHRI as stated in federal internal control standards,⁴³ OPM and agency leadership may be unable to use these data to effectively manage their workforces and resources.

⁴³GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.

⁴¹Among the payroll service providers that submit data to OPM for the 24 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies, the Department of State is the only one that does not report any data under the paid administrative leave data element to the EHRI system.

⁴²EHRI personnel data (formerly Central Personnel Data File (CPDF)) records demographic information, job information, the agency of employment and location of employees, and other aspects of the on-board Federal workforce. We previously reported that government-wide data from CPDF were 96 percent or more accurate. See GAO, *OPM's Central Personnel Data File: Data Appear Sufficiently Reliable to Meet Most Customer Needs*, GAO/GGD-98-199 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 1998).

The Total Amount and Estimated Salary Cost of Paid Administrative Leave is Difficult to Estimate

Categorical differences—the reasons for which agencies grant paid administrative leave—and reporting differences—such as including official time activities or federal holidays—contribute to variations in the total amount of paid administrative leave reported to OPM. The reasons for the paid administrative leave charges are not reported to OPM and the data may include time charged for other reasons that—like federal holidays— OPM considers as separate and distinct from paid administrative leave. This includes official time, court leave, leave for injury due to hostile action abroad, bone marrow and organ donation, and funeral leave. We estimated the extent to which federal holidays impact the total amount of paid administrative leave. However, other reasons—such as weatherrelated events—are relevant to specific employees or geographic areas, and unlike federal holidays, cannot be estimated because the hours are not charged consistently across all employees and all agencies.⁴⁴

Federal holidays. When including federal holidays among the charges, the total amount of paid administrative leave more than doubles government-wide (see figure 3). Over the 3 years we reviewed, federal employees charged a total of about 24.6 million days of paid administrative leave, or about 12 days per employee, which includes time for federal holidays for those agencies using NFC as a payroll service provider (see appendix II, table 3).⁴⁵ Of the total of about 24.6 million days of paid administrative leave, an estimated 60 percent were federal holidays.⁴⁶ Separating federal holidays from the data, the total amount of paid administrative leave falls to more than 9.9 million days across the 3 years reviewed (less than 1 percent of total employee paid days), or about 5 days per employee.

⁴⁴Weather closures affect federal employees only in the area in which the event occurs. Weather-related closures in the Washington, D.C. area would affect a significant number of federal employees, but not all because some employees are required to work under such circumstances.

⁴⁵Thirty-four agencies (including 9 CFO Act agencies) in addition to subcomponents of 6 other agencies use NFC as a payroll service provider and for which NFC reports payroll data to EHRI.

⁴⁶We estimated the total hours of federal holidays taken by all federal employees in agencies that use NFC as their payroll service provider, and for which NFC reports payroll data to EHRI, and separated those hours from the totals.



Figure 3: Paid Administrative Leave Government-wide – Estimated Totals and Federal Holidays for Fiscal Years 2011-2013

Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management's Enterprise Human Resources Integration payroll data. | GAO-15-79

Holiday impact. For those nine CFO Act agencies where federal holidays are included among the paid administrative leave time charges,⁴⁷ the average number of days of paid administrative leave per employee were among the highest government-wide (see appendix II, table 3). For example, between fiscal years 2011 and 2013, for these nine agencies, the average number of days of paid administrative leave per employee ranged from 29 to 49 days. After separating federal holidays, these agency averages decreased to between 6 and 20 days (see figure 4). Nevertheless, these agencies continue to have an average number of days of paid administrative leave the government-wide average. USAID continued to have the highest average number of days charged per employee among the 24 CFO Act agencies after separating federal holidays, dropping from nearly 49 days to 20 days.

⁴⁷These agencies use NFC as their payroll service provider, which includes federal holidays among paid administrative leave hours when reporting it to OPM's EHRI system.





Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management's Enterprise Human Resources Integration payroll data. I GAO-15-79

Note: Average days are based on the sum of paid administrative leave charges and the on-board average number of employees in pay periods containing sufficient data (not missing) across the 3year period. Most agency averages were based on data from 77 of the 79 pay periods for the 3-year period because two pay periods were missing for most agencies. These missing pay periods differed for each agency and generally occurred around the change of fiscal year.

Patterns in Paid Administrative Leave Charges

Estimated charges. Between fiscal years 2011 and 2013, most federal employees charged from less than 1 day to 20 days of paid administrative leave (see figure 5).⁴⁸ Specifically, over the 3-year period we reviewed:

- Nearly 70 percent of federal employees charged 5 days or less of paid administrative leave;
- About 90 percent of federal employees charged 10 days or less of paid administrative leave; and
- About 97 percent of federal employees charged 20 days or less of paid administrative leave.

More than 57,000, or 3 percent of federal employees, charged between 1 month and 3 years of paid administrative leave. Of these, 194 employees charged between 1 year and 1.5 years and 69 employees charged between 1.5 and 3 years of paid administrative leave.

⁴⁸Unless otherwise noted, all estimates for paid administrative leave time and salary costs exclude federal holidays.



Figure 5: Percentage of Paid Administrative Leave Days to Total Paid Days Government-wide – by Percentage of Federal Employees for Fiscal Years 2011-2013

Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management's Enterprise Human Resources Integration payroll data. | GAO-15-79

Note: Federal holidays are not included in totals. Timeframes reflect workdays, not calendar days, with 5 days per week, about 21 days per month, and 260 days per year. For example, 11 to 20 days is equivalent to about 2 to 4 weeks, and 1 to 3 months is equivalent to about 21-60 days. Amounts of paid administrative leave represent total charges per employee across three fiscal years and are not necessarily charged consecutively across days.

Closures/dismissals. Large numbers of federal employees can be granted paid administrative leave for short periods of time such as during weather-related closures and other hazardous conditions. For example, during the 3 years we reviewed, there were approximately 4.9 days of OPM closures, delays, and early dismissals in the Washington, D.C., area for hazardous conditions, including snow, a hurricane, and an earthquake. In addition, according to OPM officials, some federal agencies might dismiss employees early on the day prior to a federal holiday. These closures and dismissals result in fluctuations in the amount of paid administrative leave charges over the course of the calendar year (see figure 6).





Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management (OPM) information and OPM's Enterprise Human Resources Integration payroll data. | GAO-15-79

Note: Where noted, total days increased in association with OPM closures, early dismissals, or late arrivals for either the Washington, D.C., area or for all federal employees.

Transition and rest. Some agencies, such as USAID and DOD, grant paid administrative leave to employees transferring to a new duty location to provide time for transition activities, including packing and unpacking, reconnecting with family, and attending to other personal matters related to the relocation, such as opening bank accounts or obtaining new state or local identification. In addition, USAID provides up to 20 days of paid administrative leave for rest and recuperation for those stationed in Afghanistan. DOD provides up to 20 days of paid administrative leave for rest and recuperation per year for employees stationed in Afghanistan or lrag.

Salary Estimates for Paid Administrative Leave

Estimated salary. Total salary estimates for paid administrative leave charged from fiscal years 2011 through 2013 totaled nearly \$3.1 billion, or

less than 1 percent of total estimated salary for the federal workforce (see figure 7).⁴⁹ Over the 3-year time period, the salary cost per employee ranged from \$1,000 for OPM and the Department of Health and Human Services to \$7,300 for USAID (see appendix II, table 4). Most of the CFO Act agencies used 1 percent or less of their total estimated agency salary cost for paid administrative leave. Of the \$3.1 billion in estimated salary costs, 77 percent of salary cost estimates are associated with federal employees who charged 20 days or less of paid administrative leave.

While 3 percent of federal employees charged between 1 month and 3 years of paid administrative leave across three fiscal years, that same amount of paid administrative leave accounted for 23 percent of the estimated salary cost of paid administrative leave. As discussed previously, across the federal government, 263 employees had between 1 and 3 years of administrative leave between fiscal years 2011 and 2013. The estimated salary cost for this leave is \$31 million, or 1 percent of the total salary cost for all paid administrative leave during this period (see figure 7).

⁴⁹Unless otherwise noted, all salary estimates exclude federal holidays.





Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management's Enterprise Human Resources Integration payroll data. | GAO-15-79

Note: Federal holidays are not included in total amount or estimated salary cost of paid administrative leave. Timeframes reflect workdays, not calendar days, with 5 days per week, about 21 days per month, and 260 days per year. For example, 11 to 20 days is equivalent to about 2 to 4 weeks, and 1 to 3 months is equivalent to about 21-60 days. Leave amounts charged and associated salary cost estimates represent totals per employee across 3 fiscal years and leave is not necessarily charged consecutively across days.

Personnel Matters and Physical Fitness Activities were the Most Common Reasons for Charging Large Amounts of Paid Administrative Leave

Employees with high charges. At the 24 CFO Act agencies we identified more than 26,000 employees charging paid administrative leave in amounts relatively higher than the average charges at each agency (see appendix III, tables 5 and 6 for summary data on employees with higher-than-average amounts of paid administrative leave at each of the 24 CFO Act agencies).⁵⁰ On average, these employees across the 24 CFO Act agencies charged approximately 51 days of paid administrative leave between fiscal years 2011 and 2013. During this 3-year time period, total paid administrative leave per employee ranged between 15 and 730 days. At the five agencies we reviewed, we identified more than 17,000 employees charging relatively higher amounts of paid administrative leave. From among these 17,000 employees, we selected a nongeneralizable sample of 312 employees based on (1) those employees who had charged the highest amounts of paid administrative leave, and (2) a random selection from among the remaining employees (see appendix I for a detailed description of sample selection process). We asked agencies to provide reasons for the two largest total amounts of paid administrative leave charged per employee in the 3-year period of fiscal years 2011 through 2013.

Summary of reasons. Of the 312 employees selected for further review at the five agencies, we found, through analysis of agency responses, that the most common reasons for charging higher-than-average amounts of paid administrative leave included personnel matters (such as investigations into alleged misconduct or criminal actions), physical fitness-related activities, and periods of rest and recuperation for employees working in overseas locations. Agencies were asked to provide reasons for the two largest total amounts of paid administrative leave charges per employee. For nearly 70 percent of the employees selected, agencies provided one reason for the paid administrative leave, but for 79 employees (25 percent) agencies provided two reasons for the largest amounts of paid administrative leave. For 5 percent of employees selected, agencies were unable to provide any reason for the amount of paid administrative leave. Of the reasons provided for paid administrative leave charges, 34 percent were for personnel matters, 16 percent were for physical fitness-related activities, and 15 percent were for travel to and

⁵⁰We defined "relatively higher" as charges to paid administrative leave in excess of three standard deviations from the agency average. See appendix I for further details.

from duty locations, including rest and recuperation periods for employees working overseas (see table 2 below).

Predominant reason. Among selected employees, the most commonly cited reason for large amounts of paid administrative leave was personnel matters, which was cited as a reason for paid administrative leave at all five of our selected agencies. Examples of personnel matters include investigations into alleged misconduct, criminal matters, or security concerns as well as settlement agreements, pending adverse actions due to inappropriate behavior, and interim relief.⁵¹ Agency officials told us that these personnel matters concluded in a variety of ways including removal, retirement, resignation, reinstatement of employee, and settlement agreement.

As discussed above, personnel matters are cited in four of the five selected agencies' policies as a permissible reason for authorizing paid administrative leave. Personnel matters are not explicitly listed as a permissible reason in DOD policy although officials confirmed that they do authorize paid administrative leave for this reason.

Other reasons. Three of the most frequently cited reasons for higherthan-average amounts of paid administrative leave are specific to the policies and practices of one or two of the selected agencies. These reasons include

 Physical fitness-related activities. Both GSA and DOD reported that selected employees charged paid administrative leave for physical fitness-related activities, with GSA having the most selected employees granted paid administrative leave for fitness-related activities. An agency official at a GSA subcomponent told us that it was following a policy allowing employees up to 3 hours per week in paid administrative leave for the purposes of physical fitness-related activities. GSA reported that this policy was abolished in fiscal year 2014, outside the time period of the data collected for this analysis (fiscal years 2011 through 2013).

⁵¹If an administrative judge for the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) issues an interim order to reinstate an employee pending the outcome of a review by MSPB, but the agency determines that the employee's return would be unduly disruptive to the workplace, while the agency is not required to return the employee to work, it must place the employee in a pay status to comply with the interim order pending any appeal. See, 5 U.S.C. § 7701(b)(2) and 5 C.F.R. § 1201.111(c).

- *Vacation.* A specific group of contract employees at a subcomponent of Interior recorded authorized vacation time as paid administrative leave. Interior indicated that it plans to explore other options for recording authorized vacation time for these employees.
- Professional development. Participating in professional development activities, including attending training, was a reason reported for employees with higher-than-average amounts of paid administrative leave at VA and DOD. Officials from a VA subcomponent told us that paid administrative leave is granted to certain employees so that they could attend medical training for the purposes of earning or maintaining their professional licenses.

Table 2: Reasons for the Largest Total Amounts of Paid Administrative Leave by Number of Times Cited for Selected Employees^a

Reason for paid administrative leave charges	Number of times reason was cited ^b	
Personnel matters (including investigations into alleged misconduct, criminal matters, and security concerns as well as settlement agreements, pending administrative actions, and		
interim relief)	132	
Physical fitness-related activities ^c	61	
Travel to/from duty locations (including relocation, temporary duty locations, and rest and recuperation $periods$) ^c	58	
Weather-related circumstances	38	
Training and professional development (including conferences and agency-sponsored attendance to school programs)	28	
Official time (union and labor relations activities) ^c	24	
Authorized vacation time reported as paid administrative leave ^c	21	
Agency could not provide a reason for paid administrative leave charges/insufficient information/no record of employee	15	
Other ^d	14	
Total	391	

Source: GAO analysis of agency responses. | GAO-15-79

N=391, includes one reason for 312 employees and an additional reason for 79 employees.

^aEmployees were selected from population of employees at the five selected agencies who had amounts of paid administrative leave that was relatively higher than each agency's average amount of paid administrative leave per employee.

^bAgencies were asked to provide the reasons for the two largest total amounts of paid administrative leave taken in fiscal years 2011 through 2013 per selected employee. Of the 312 selected employees, agencies provided us more than one reason in 79 (25 percent) of these cases. Agencies were not asked if the additional reason accounted for more or less of the paid administrative leave than the first reason listed. Weather-related circumstances and birthdays were the only two reasons consistently cited alongside another reason.

^cIn some instances for these reasons, the agencies noted that this was a timekeeping error and that paid administrative leave should not have been charged for this reason.

^d Reasons aggregated in "other" category were cited fewer than four times and included birthdays, holidays, blood or organ donations, hazardous conditions, time off awards, as well as military leave (recorded as paid administrative leave due to technical limitations of agency time and attendance system) and duty time (recorded as paid administrative leave in error).

Federal agencies have the discretion to grant paid administrative leave to Conclusions employees to help manage their workforces when it is in their best interest to do so. This discretion is important in ensuring that employees are not placed in dangerous circumstances, have access to professional development opportunities, and are able to participate in civic activities during work hours. Nonetheless, since paid administrative leave is a cost to the taxpayer, its use should be managed effectively. While each agency has differences in its policies for granting paid administrative leave, we found that data collected by OPM on the amount of such leave do not accurately reflect the reasons in agency policies for granting-nor what OPM considers to be—paid administrative leave. Therefore, OPM data on paid administrative leave are inaccurate and inconsistent across agencies. Ensuring a more consistent and accurate measure of data across agencies could enable both federal agencies and OPM to more effectively oversee the use of paid administrative leave. Such data are important for understanding the extent to which paid administrative leave is used across the government and for potentially identifying instances of abuse. OPM's collection of payroll data from federal agencies, including data on paid administrative leave, could provide relevant and reliable information to assist OPM and federal agencies in more effectively managing the federal workforce. OPM has collected these data for several years, but has not ensured that the data are valid. Our work confirms that the data OPM has collected on paid administrative leave do not comport with what OPM officials intended to collect. For example, the data included time off for federal holidays and other legislatively authorized leave that OPM does not consider administrative leave. As a result, OPM does not have an accurate measure on the use of paid administrative leave across federal agencies that can be used to inform decision makers on the use of paid administrative leave. Continuing to collect these data without ensuring their accuracy is costly to both OPM and federal agencies. In addition, using these data to manage the federal workforce could result in decisions based upon faulty conclusions that stem from inaccurate data. OPM officials told us that, while they had not reviewed the quality of the payroll data, they intend to establish a working group in fiscal year 2015 toward this end. As part of our ongoing work to review the completeness
	and accuracy of the payroll data, we will follow up on the status of OPM's working group.
	By working with agencies to improve recording practices and by working with payroll providers to report the relevant data, OPM has an opportunity to help agencies manage their workforce and resources and provide decisions makers with reliable information on the use of administrative leave. This could assist both agencies and OPM in making informed decisions to effectively manage the federal workforce. Improving the data is consistent with internal control standards and OPM's stated goals for collecting and warehousing the Enterprise Human Resources Integration (EHRI) system data.
Recommendations	To help ensure that agencies report comparable and reliable data to EHRI, we recommend that the Director of OPM, in coordination with agencies and payroll service providers, take the following actions:
	 Develop guidance for agencies on which activities to enter, or not enter, as paid administrative leave in agency time and attendance systems; and
	• Provide updated and specific guidance to payroll service providers on which activities to report, or not report, to the paid administrative leave data element in EHRI.
Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	We provided the Secretaries of the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, the Interior, State, and Veterans Affairs, as well as the Administrator of the General Services Administration and the Directors of the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Office of Personnel Management with a draft of this report for their review and comment.
	In its written comments, reproduced in appendix IV, OPM partially agreed with our recommendations. OPM also provided technical comments that we incorporated, as appropriate. We also received written comments from USDA, DOD, and VA, which are reproduced in appendixes V, VI, and VII. USDA stated it generally agreed with the findings, and provided technical comments that we incorporated, as appropriate. DOD neither agreed nor disagreed with the findings and recommendations, and provided technical comments that we incorporated, as appropriate. VA stated it agreed with the conclusions and concurred with the recommendations. State also provided technical comments that we incorporated that we incorporated, as appropriate. In

emails received on September 29, 2014, October 6, 2014, and October 2, 2014, respectively, the liaisons for Interior, GSA, and USAID stated that the agencies did not have any comments on the report.

OPM agreed in its comments that

- Some reporting requirements should be clarified, in particular, guidance regarding reporting holiday time;
- It will clarify that the paid administrative leave category is a catchall category for paid leave that does not fall into another EHRI category; and
- It will collaborate with agencies and payroll providers in developing changes in guidance and EHRI payroll data elements.

OPM recommended that our two recommendations be combined into one. Regarding our first recommendation that OPM develop guidance for agencies on which activities to enter, or not enter, as paid administrative leave in agency time and attendance systems, OPM stated that it reflected an incorrect understanding of its role. OPM said that its role does not include directing guidance to agencies on how to collect time and attendance data, but it does include issuing guidance on EHRI data requirements that agency systems should support. We do not agree that the recommendations should be combined nor that the first recommendation is inconsistent with OPM's role. Our first recommendation is directed at the need for OPM to clarify agencies' understanding of how leave should be reported and entered appropriately into time and attendance systems. In directing EHRI data requirements to all responsible agency officials and payroll providers, OPM can provide such guidance to agencies. Our second recommendation is directed at what payroll providers report from these agency time and attendance systems to EHRI as paid administrative leave.

Based on our findings, guidance from OPM could directly impact how agencies record time for paid administrative leave activities in agency time and attendance systems, thereby increasing the likelihood that agency data that are ultimately reported to EHRI would be more accurate. We believe that this guidance is within the purview of OPM's role and is similar to guidance that OPM has provided in the past. OPM acknowledges as much when it states in its comments on this report that "[EHRI data requirements] guidance is not just for payroll providers, but for all parties involved in collecting and reporting relevant data." Moreover, in agency comments to this report, two of the eight agencies indicated that they would benefit from such guidance from OPM. For example, VA indicated that it is reviewing how the agency approves and charges paid administrative leave. In doing so, VA stated that it will coordinate with OPM to ensure consistency with OPM's interpretation of when administrative leave is appropriate. USDA noted that additional guidance from OPM would greatly benefit how paid administrative leave is managed. Based on our findings and agency comments, we feel that if agencies had a common understanding of what OPM considers paid administrative leave, then the agencies would be more capable of meeting OPM's data reporting requirements.

Concerning the second recommendation for OPM to provide updated and specific guidance to payroll service providers on which activities to report, or not report, to the paid administrative leave data element in EHRI, we continue to believe it is valid because we found that payroll providers were reporting time for activities as paid administrative leave that they should not, according to OPM. Our assessment of OPM guidance demonstrated that it was limited and it was not clear as to what activities should be included or excluded from the paid administrative leave data element. Therefore, we believe that clarification of the guidance could enhance payroll providers' understanding of the paid administrative leave category and minimize future errors.

OPM also recommended that we include a recommendation to agencies and payroll providers to collaborate with OPM as it revises its guidance and to modify systems and procedures to comply with OPM data reporting requirements. While these are important issues, we did not assess agency and payroll provider collaboration with OPM nor did we fully assess agency and payroll provider compliance with OPM data reporting requirements. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for us to include such a recommendation.

In commenting on the draft report, while DOD did not state whether it agreed with the findings and recommendations, it stated that it provided comments to enhance context, add clarity, and affirm agency discretion in granting or placing personnel on paid administrative leave. For example, DOD stated that, "in order to add clarity to the scope of administrative leave as opposed to other forms of leave, clear coding standards should be identified...." Such comments are consistent with the intent of our recommendations that OPM work with agencies and payroll providers to develop and update guidance clarifying how agencies record, and payroll providers report, paid administrative leave.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretaries of Agriculture, Defense, the Interior, State, and Veterans Affairs, the Administrator of the General Services Administration, the Directors of the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Office of Personnel Management, and interested congressional committees. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at http://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2717 or jonesy@gao.gov. Contact points for our offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix VIII.

Goonne D. Jones

Yvonne D. Jones Director Strategic Issues

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

In this report, we had three objectives including (1) describe policies for paid administrative leave at selected federal agencies; (2) review agencies' and payroll providers' practices in recording and reporting paid administrative leave, and describe the number of federal employees granted such leave, the total number of days granted, and the associated salary costs; and (3) describe categories of reasons for which large amounts of paid administrative leave have been charged by individual employees at selected federal agencies.¹ To better understand the reasons why federal agencies authorize paid administrative leave for federal employees and the extent to which it is used government-wide, we analyzed payroll data from OPM's Enterprise Human Resources Integration (EHRI) system. We selected five agencies at which to review administrative leave policies and collect information on the reasons why selected employees had large amounts of paid administrative leave.

To obtain an understanding of the reasons why agencies authorize paid administrative leave for federal employees, we used OPM's EHRI payroll data (described below) to select five federal agencies—the Departments of Defense, the Interior, and Veterans Affairs; General Services Administration; and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—based upon two factors: (1) the percentage of employees with amounts of paid administrative leave that was relatively higher than each agency's average, and (2) the agency's average amount of administrative leave per employee. For these five selected agencies, we reviewed leave policies and time and attendance guidance for granting and recording paid administrative leave, respectively, and interviewed agency officials. We compared the administrative leave policies of the five agencies and, in the case of DOD, some subcomponent policies, and categorized the reasons authorizing such leave to determine those that are similar or different across the agencies.

To determine the extent of use, the total amount, and salary costs of paid administrative leave, we analyzed payroll data from OPM's EHRI system for each agency between fiscal years 2011 and 2013. OPM's EHRI payroll data include paid administrative leave data for more than 100 federal agencies, including 23 of the 24 agencies covered by the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990, as amended (the Department of

¹We defined "large amounts," also referred to as "relatively higher amounts," as paid administrative leave charges in excess of three standard deviations from the agency average.

State (State) does not report paid administrative leave separately from regular work hours).² OPM's goal for the EHRI payroll data is to securely acquire pay data for all federal civilian employees by leveraging existing data extraction processes. Payroll data are submitted electronically to OPM by payroll service providers. Payroll data submissions from providers to EHRI represent actual payroll records in a given pay period. The EHRI payroll data covers employees in pay and nonpay status. The data includes all federal civilian employees of the Executive Branch except for employees in the intelligence community, U.S. Postal Service,³ and selected positions, such as nonappropriated fund personnel, commissioned officers in the Departments of Commerce, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security, and the Environmental Protection Agency, and, as of March 2006, foreign service personnel at State. The file does not include employees of the Judicial Branch, and Legislative Branch coverage is limited to the Government Printing Office, the U.S. Tax Court, and several small commissions.

We conducted substantial electronic testing and interviewed cognizant officials at OPM to assess the reliability of the EHRI payroll data. Officials at OPM explained that they had not tested the data for consistency nor validated it against agency data. In our testing, we examined the data provided for obvious errors, inconsistencies, and missing data; conducted

²31 U.S.C. § 901(b). The 24 CFO Act agencies are the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, the Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, the Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, as well as the Agency for International Development, Environmental Protection Agency, General Services Administration, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Science Foundation, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Office of Personnel Management, Small Business Administration, and Social Security Administration.

³The data exclude employees from the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, Federal Reserve System - Board of Governors, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Office of the Vice President, Postal Rate Commission, Tennessee Valley Authority, U.S. Postal Service, and the White House Office.

logic tests; and compared data to EHRI personnel data.⁴ We also interviewed officials at the four payroll service centers⁵ used by the five selected agencies to better understand what the data on paid administrative leave include when the data are reported to OPM's EHRI system. From this assessment, we determined that the data from fiscal years 2011 to 2013 are reliable for the purposes of this study. Data prior to fiscal year 2011 were not reliable due to missing data and because fewer agencies reported the data to OPM during that time. However, the data for fiscal years 2011 to 2013 have several limitations. First, the data represent charges to specific categories of leave and other activities that vary by agency, thus they are not comparable across agencies. For example, one agency might instruct employees to record court leave as paid administrative leave whereas employees at another agency may record it under a separate category. In addition, we found that one payroll service provider included federal holidays among the paid administrative leave hours, whereas the other three payroll service providers include holiday hours in regular duty time or do not report them at all. Finally, the reasons for the charges to administrative leave are not specified in the data, so it is not possible to determine why employees charged leave, if it corresponds to the agency's policy for administrative leave, or if it includes time when employees were participating in activities directly related to their job responsibilities. These limitations are described in the report and accompany the presentation of data so they can be properly understood in the context of the noted limitations.

To summarize EHRI data on paid administrative leave, we totaled the number of hours per employee at each agency then converted that to an estimated amount of days assuming an 8-hour work day. Total amounts

⁴EHRI personnel data (formerly Central Personnel Data File (CPDF)) records demographic information, job information, the agency of employment and location of employees, and other aspects of the on-board Federal workforce. We previously reported that government-wide data from CPDF were 96 percent or more accurate. See GAO, *OPM's Central Personnel Data File: Data Appear Sufficiently Reliable to Meet Most Customer Needs*, GAO/GGD-98-199 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 1998). OPM recently repeated that assessment and found similar results. See OPM, *An Assessment of the Accuracy of Data Elements in the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's EHRI-Statistical Data Mart* (Washington, D.C., August 2013).

⁵These four payroll service providers are the National Finance Center, General Services Administration, Interior Business Center, and Defense Finance and Accounting Services. All 24 CFO Act agencies, except the Department of State, use these four payroll service providers.

of administrative leave are summed across the three fiscal years and are not necessarily charged consecutively. We calculated the average number of paid administrative leave days charged per person for the 3year period at each agency. We calculated this average using the sum of paid administrative leave charges and the on-board average number of employees in pay periods with sufficient data (not missing) across the 3year period. While there were 79 pay periods in the 3-year period, most agency averages were based on data from 77 pay periods because 2 pay periods were missing for most agencies. While missing pay periods differed for each agency, they generally occurred around the change of fiscal year. We calculated the per person average to provide an easier interpretation of hours of paid administrative leave. We chose a 3-year average because paid administrative leave is not uniformly distributed across pay periods or years. We calculated the per person average by agency because of differences in agency size. We used actual employee salaries and work schedules, where available, to estimate the salary cost of paid administrative leave hours and all other paid hours. Salary cost was adjusted for inflation and prorated for work schedule. If salary and work schedule information was unavailable, we used the average agency salary, adjusted for inflation, to estimate the salary cost of paid administrative leave hours and all other paid hours. We then prorated the salary estimate based on the proportion of full-time and part-time employees in the federal workforce. Unless otherwise noted, all summary data and salary estimates for paid administrative leave exclude federal holidays. As described in the report, federal holidays are included in paid administrative leave data reported to OPM's EHRI system for those agencies that use National Finance Center (NFC) for payroll service. Since federal holidays should not be charged to administrative leave, per OPM officials' expectations, and because they occur regularly and are generally applicable across all federal employees, we estimated the total amount of federal holiday hours used for those agencies using NFC and disaggregated the total time from paid administrative leave charges. Not all federal employees are eligible for holiday pay. For example, firefighters and part-time employees whose work schedules do not fall on a particular holiday may not receive holiday pay. Consequently, we only deducted holiday hours from a pay period during which a holiday occurred if paid administrative leave hours were charged in that pay period.

Finally, to describe categories of reasons why employees had large amounts of leave, we selected a nongeneralizable sample of employees at each of the five selected agencies and asked officials at each agency to provide reasons for the two largest total amounts of paid administrative leave per employee. To select the employees, we first identified those "outlier" employees charging paid administrative leave in amounts relatively higher than average (greater than three standard deviations from the agency mean) at each of the five selected agencies, finding more than 17,000 employees. Among those employees with large amounts of charges across the five agencies, we selected 70 for each of the five agencies. This included the 35 employees with the highest total amount of paid administrative leave and another 35 employees randomly selected from the remaining "outlier" employees. For one of the five selected agencies, USAID, there were only 32 "outlier" employees, so we did not request information for more than those 32 employees.⁶ Using a standard form for each agency, we provided a listing of each of the selected employees and the total amount of administrative leave each employee charged between fiscal years 2011 and 2013. For each of these employees, we asked the agency to provide all the reasons for which the administrative leave was charged and to identify two of those reasons that accounted for the majority of the total charges across the 3 years. We conducted an independent analysis of the responses provided by each agency, where one analyst categorized the reasons provided independently from a second analyst, and then compared the results. The analysts' initial assessment was in agreement 96 percent of the time. Where there was any disagreement, the analysts discussed to come to consensus. Results of our analysis of reasons for administrative leave charges are not generalizable to the selected agencies or governmentwide because of sample size and selection method.

We conducted this performance audit from November 2013 to October 2014 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe

⁶During the course of our review, we discovered that federal holidays were included among the paid administrative leave charges in OPM's EHRI data for those federal agencies that use NFC as a payroll provider. Our selection of five agencies and outlier employees from these selected agencies was based upon data that included federal holidays. However, we separated federal holidays for purposes of reporting, including the number of outlier employees for all CFO Act agencies. Since USAID uses NFC, the number of outliers increases to 52 when separating federal holidays. We did not request additional information from USAID on these employees due to the additional burden on the agency to collect the information, and because it would not materially impact our findings since the information is nongeneralizable and used for illustrative purposes.

that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Paid Administrative Leave Summary Data by Agency

Table 3: FY2011-2013 Paid Administrative Leave Charges by Agency

Agency	Total paid admi	Average number of days charged per em	administrative leave ployee FY2011-2013 ^a	
	Including Holidays	Excluding holidays	Including Holidays	Excluding Holidays
Chief Financial Off	ïcers Act Agencies Using N	lational Finance Cente	r Payroll Service Provide	r
Agriculture ^b	3,307,800	833,100	35	9
Commerce ^b	1,313,000	279,500	29	6
Homeland Security ^b	5,437,200	1,513,800	29	8
Housing and Urban Development ^b	349,200	73,900	37	8
Justice ^b	3,649,600	653,200	31	6
Labor ^b	583,000	108,600	35	7
Small Business Administration ^b	132,000	27,000	35	7
Treasury ^b	3,571,700	820,700	32	7
USAID ^b	185,900	77,400	49	20

Chief Financial Officers Act Agencies Using Other Payroll Service Providers

Defense		2,365,800		3
Education		22,300		5
Energy		84,500		5
Environmental Protection Agency	Not Applicable	41,300	Not Applicable	2
General Services Administration		14,900		1
Health and Human Services		127,200		2
Interior	Holidays are not included in	345,400	Holidays are not included in	5
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	total charges to paid	90,900	total charges to paid	5
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	administrative leave. See	20,500	administrative leave. See	5
National Science Foundation	Excluding Holidays" column for amounts	8,900	"Excluding Holidays" column for average number	6
Office of Personnel Management	included in government-	11,300	of days charged per	2
Social Security Administration	wide total below	372,600	employee	6
State ^c		-		-
Transportation		171,400		3
Veterans Affairs		1,375,000		4

	Other Agencies Using All Pay	roll Service Providers		
All Other Agencies ^d	1,016,200	505,200	20	10
Government-wide ^e	24,597,700^f	9,944,400	12	5

Source: GAO analysis of OPM's EHRI payroll data. I GAO-15-79

Note: Total days of paid administrative leave are calculated by summing all hours charged per pay period from fiscal years 2011 through 2013, and assume an 8-hour work day. Total days are rounded to the nearest 100, so summing agency amounts may not equal the government-wide total. Administrative leave is not necessarily charged in consecutive hours or days.

^aAverage based on the sum of paid administrative leave charges and the on-board average number of employees in pay periods containing sufficient data (not missing) across the 3-year period. Most agency averages were based on data from 77 of the 79 pay periods for the 3-year period because 2 pay periods were missing for most agencies. These missing pay periods differed for each agency and generally occurred around the change of fiscal year.

^bAgency payroll service provider, the National Finance Center (NFC), reports federal holidays to OPM as paid administrative leave.

^cState does not report paid administrative leave separately to OPM/EHRI. Instead, paid administrative leave is tracked in the agency's time and attendance system and is aggregated and reported with regular duty hours to OPM's EHRI system.

^dThese include more than 100 other agencies, some of which use NFC as a payroll service provider, which reports federal holidays to OPM as paid administrative leave.

^eIncludes all federal agencies reporting to EHRI, some of which use NFC as a payroll service provider, which reports federal holidays to OPM as paid administrative leave.

¹This includes the total paid administrative leave days, excluding holidays, for those Chief Financial Officer Act agencies that use a payroll service provider other than NFC since federal holidays for those agencies are not included in the total charges to paid administrative leave and, therefore, were not adjusted.

Table 4: FY2011-2013 Estimated Salary Cost of Paid Administrative Leave by Agency

Agency	Estimated salary cost FY2011-2013	Estimated salary cost FY2011-2013	Estimated average salary cost per employee FY2011- 2013 ^a	Estimated average salary cost per employee FY2011-2013 ^a	
	Including Holidays	Excluding Holidays	Including Holidays	Excluding Holidays	Excluding Holidays
	Chief Financial Officers	Act Agencies Using Na	ational Finance Center	Payroll Service Provide	er
Agriculture ^b	\$ 909,889,200	\$ 219,433,800	\$ 7,200	\$ 1,900	1.11%
Commerce ^b	512,227,900	105,960,500	10,800	2,300	0.84%
Homeland Security ^b	1,629,529,700	380,479,700	7,200	1,800	0.93%
Housing and Urban Development ^b	136,366,400	28,495,600	12,300	2,700	1.01%
Justice ^b	1,272,964,500	219,083,000	9,900	1,800	0.72%
Labor ^b	203,313,700	36,863,700	10,000	1,900	0.84%
Small Business Administration ^b	48,971,100	9,755,600	8,000	1,800	0.91%
Treasury ^b	1,139,039,900	249,174,400	8,600	1,900	0.92%
USAID ^b	78,646,200	32,374,200	16,400	7,300	2.61%

Defense		697,659,300	Using Other Payroll Service P	1,100	0.40%
Education		9,133,400		1,900	0.65%
Energy		34,585,800		1,900	0.67%
Environmental Protection Agency	Not Applicable	17,550,100	Not Applicable	1,200	0.29%
General Services Administration		5,313,600		1,200	0.15%
Health and Human Services	Holidays are not included in total charges to paid	47,175,200	Holidays are not included in total charges to paid	1,000	0.20%
Interior	administrative leave. See	94,787,500	administrative leave. See	1,200	0.59%
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	"Excluding Holidays" column for estimated	39,845,800	"Excluding Holidays" column for average	2,100	0.62%
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	 salary cost included in government-wide total 	9,559,100	salary cost per employee	2,200	0.66%
National Science Foundation	- below	3,913,900		2,100	0.75%
Office of Personnel Management		3,602,700		1,000	0.21%
Social Security Administration		111,012,200		1,500	0.74%
State ^c		-		-	-

Agency	Estimated salary cost FY2011-2013	Estimated salary cost FY2011-2013	Estimated average salary cost per employee FY2011- 2013 ^a	Estimated average salary cost per employee FY2011-2013 ^a	Percent of estimated total agency salary cost FY2011-2013
Transportation		72,317,000		1,400	0.38%
Veterans Affairs		451,294,000		1,700	0.64%
	Oth	er Agencies Using All	Payroll Service Provide	ers	
All Other Agencies ^d	435,197,500	207,052,700	7,700	3,700	1.27%
Government-wide ^e	\$ 7,963,895,600 ^f	\$ 3,086,422,700	\$ 4,000	\$ 1,600	0.61%

Source: GAO analysis of OPM's EHRI payroll data. I GAO-15-79

Note: Total salary is rounded to the nearest 100, so summing agency amounts may not equal the government-wide total.

^aEstimated average salary cost per employee is based upon all employees with charges to paid administrative leave and does not include those employees with no such charges.

^bAgency payroll service provider, the National Finance Center (NFC), reports federal holidays to OPM as paid administrative leave.

^cState does not report paid administrative leave separately to OPM/EHRI. Instead, paid administrative leave is tracked in the agency's time and attendance system and is aggregated and reported with regular duty hours to OPM's EHRI system.

^dThese include more than 100 other agencies, some of which use NFC as a payroll service provider, which reports federal holidays to OPM as paid administrative leave.

^eIncludes all federal agencies reporting to EHRI, some of which use NFC as a payroll service provider, which reports federal holidays to OPM as paid administrative leave.

^fThis includes the estimated salary cost, excluding holidays, for those Chief Financial Officer Act agencies that use a payroll service provider other than NFC since federal holidays for those agencies are not included in the total charges to paid administrative leave and, therefore, were not adjusted.

Appendix III: Employees with Higher-Than-Average Total Administrative Leave by CFO Act Agency

Table 5: Number of Employees at Each CFO Act Agency from Fiscal Years 2011 through 2013 with Higher-Than-Average Total Administrative Leave by Time Range (excluding federal holidays)^a

		Total paid administrative leave from FY2011 through FY2013								
Agency	11-20 days	1-3 months	3-6 months	6-9 months	9-12 months	1-1.5 years	1.5-2 years	2-2.5 years	2.5-3 years	Total
Agriculture	0	2,262	98	36	15	9	3	0	0	2,423
Commerce	0	253	26	9	5	4	1	1	0	299
Defense	0	8,617	701	189	65	45	9	4	0	9,630
Education	14	40	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	56
Energy	0	35	34	11	7	4	2	0	0	93
Environmental Protection Agency	0	50	8	6	3	1	1	0	0	69
General Services Administration	25	122	6	2	1	0	0	0	0	156
Health and Human Services	89	298	59	12	7	3	1	0	0	469
Homeland Security	0	470	335	118	45	54	11	4	2	1,039
Housing and Urban Development	0	136	26	11	1	1	0	0	0	175
Interior	0	1,489	109	26	15	4	0	0	0	1,643
Justice	0	1,690	136	22	1	0	0	0	0	1,849
Labor	0	80	25	7	7	0	0	0	0	119
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	0	42	11	4	2	2	0	0	0	61
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	21	14	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	36
National Science Foundation	6	13	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Office of Personnel Management	0	22	4	6	2	3	0	0	0	37
Small Business Administration	0	5	5	3	0	3	1	0	0	17
Social Security Administration	0	268	57	11	5	2	1	0	0	344
State ^b	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transportation	9	340	53	14	4	3	1	0	0	424

	Total paid administrative leave from FY2011 through FY2013									
Agency	11-20 days	1-3 months	3-6 months	6-9 months	9-12 months	1-1.5 years	1.5-2 years	2-2.5 years	2.5-3 years	Total
Treasury	0	775	276	65	17	17	2	3	3	1,158
USAID	0	0	42	6	3	0	0	1	0	52 ^c
Veterans Affairs	0	5,077	814	148	56	31	11	3	1	6,141
Total for 24 CFO Act Agencies	164	22,098	2,828	707	261	186	44	16	6	26,310

Source: GAO analysis of OPM's EHRI payroll data. I GAO-15-79

Note: Timeframes reflect workdays, not calendar days, with 5 days per week, about 21 days per month, and 260 days per year. For example, 11 to 20 days is equivalent to about 2 to 4 weeks, and 1 to 3 months is equivalent to about 21-60 days. Amounts of paid administrative leave represent total charges per employee across three fiscal years and are not necessarily charged consecutively across days.

^aIncludes all employees within an agency that have charges to paid administrative leave in excess of three standard deviations from the agency average.

^bState does not report paid administrative leave separately to OPM/EHRI. Instead, paid administrative leave is tracked in the agency's time and attendance system and is aggregated and reported with regular work hours to OPM's EHRI system.

^cDuring the course of our review, we discovered that federal holidays were included among the paid administrative leave charges in OPM's EHRI data for those federal agencies that use NFC as a payroll provider. Our selection of five agencies and outlier employees from these selected agencies was based upon data that included federal holidays. However, we disaggregated federal holidays for purposes of reporting, including the number of outlier employees for all CFO Act agencies. Since USAID uses NFC, the number of outliers increases to 52 when disaggregating federal holidays. We did not request additional information from USAID on these employees due to the additional burden on the agency to collect the information, and because it would not materially impact our findings since the information is nongeneralizable and used for illustrative purposes.

Table 6: Summary of Employees with Higher-Than-Average Administrative Leave by Agency from Fiscal Years 2011 through2013 (excluding federal holidays)^a

Agency	Total days	Average Days	Minimum Days	Maximum Days	Number of Employees	Percent of Total Agency Employees
Agriculture	120,212	50	33	460	2,423	1.72%
Commerce	15,510	52	24	563	299	0.44%
Defense	409,420	43	21	633	9,630	0.99%
Education	1,698	30	18	155	56	1.00%
Energy	10,373	112	35	480	93	0.47%
Environmental Protection Agency	4,711	68	21	425	69	0.33%
General Services Administration	5,730	37	15	197	156	1.05%
Health and Human Services	22,521	48	15	420	469	0.43%
Homeland Security	107,749	104	38	730	1,039	0.44%

Appendix III: Employees with Higher-Than-Average Total Administrative Leave by CFO Act Agency

Agency	Total days	Average Days	Minimum Days	Maximum Days	Number of Employees	Percent of Total Agency Employees
Housing and Urban Development	10,920	62	37	333	175	1.54%
Interior	79,916	49	25	299	1,643	1.46%
Justice	70,215	38	23	202	1,849	1.35%
Labor	8,144	68	27	258	119	0.57%
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	4,074	67	23	286	61	0.29%
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	885	25	15	96	36	0.76%
National Science Foundation	601	30	17	102	20	0.94%
Office of Personnel Management	3,736	101	28	339	37	0.41%
Small Business Administration	2,587	152	37	408	17	0.23%
Social Security Administration	17,985	52	22	518	344	0.46%
State ^b	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transportation	20,210	48	20	409	424	0.63%
Treasury	82,356	71	34	676	1,158	0.78%
USAID ^c	6,178	119	78	550	52	1.05%
Veterans Affairs	330,055	54	30	682	6,141	1.44%
Summary for 24 CFO Act Agencies ^d	1,335,785	51	15	730	26,310	1.00%

Source: GAO analysis of OPM's EHRI payroll data. I GAO-15-79

^aIncludes all employees within an agency that have charges to paid administrative leave in excess of three standard deviations from the agency average.

^bState does not report paid administrative leave separately to OPM/EHRI. Instead, paid administrative leave is tracked in the agency's time and attendance system and is aggregated and reported with regular work hours to OPM's EHRI system.

^cDuring the course of our review, we discovered that federal holidays were included among the paid administrative leave charges in OPM's EHRI data for those federal agencies that use NFC as a payroll provider. Our selection of five agencies and outlier employees from these selected agencies was based upon data that included federal holidays. However, we disaggregated federal holidays for purposes of reporting, including the number of outlier employees for all CFO Act agencies. Since USAID uses NFC, the number of outliers increases to 52 when disaggregating federal holidays. We did not request additional information from USAID on these employees due to the additional burden on the agency to collect the information, and because it would not materially impact our findings since the information is nongeneralizable and used for illustrative purposes.

^dSummary includes data for those agencies that report paid administrative leave to OPM's EHRI system.

Appendix IV: Comments from the Office of Personnel Management



Our partial concurrence is also based on the fact that OPM has already issued guidance on reporting into the EHRI database various categories of leave, including annual leave, sick leave, official time, four categories of military leave, bone marrow leave, organ donor leave, court leave, and administrative leave. Some of the data problems GAO identified were caused by agencies not reporting leave under an established category that clearly applied (e.g., court leave) and instead placing that leave under the administrative leave category. Many agencies and payroll providers may not have fully updated their data systems to respond to OPM payroll data requirements. Since these payroll data requirements are relatively new and extensive, and since agency budgets are constrained, OPM understands that agencies may not have been able to comply immediately with all EHRI payroll data requirements but expects agencies to take actions to move steadily toward full compliance. OPM agrees that we should provide clarifying guidance regarding holiday time off. OPM does not currently require separate EHRI payroll data on holiday time off, which apparently confused at least one payroll provider and resulted in holiday time off data being reported under the administrative leave category. OPM will also clarify that the administrative leave category is a catchall category for any administratively authorized absence from duty without loss of pay or charge to leave that does not fall into another EHRI category. OPM will collaborate with agencies and payroll providers in developing this guidance and any changes in EHRI payroll data elements. RECOMMENDATION #2: Provide updated and specific guidance to payroll service providers on which activities to report, or not report, to paid administrative leave data element in EHRI. OPM partially concurs with this recommendation for the same reasons provided in our response to Recommendation #1. Technical comments are also enclosed. Unless otherwise noted, the suggested revisions are provided to help ensure technical accuracy. Thank you for the time and effort that went into developing this report, and for the opportunity to provide our comments. Please contact Janet Barnes, Director, Internal Oversight & Compliance on (202) 606-3207 should your office require additional information. Sincerely, athenic brekulet Katherine Archuleta Director Enclosure

Appendix V: Comments from the Department of Agriculture

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	United States Department of Agriculture
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) Independence nue, SW hington, DC 50	Yvonne D. Jones Director, Strategic Issues U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street NW Washington, DC 20548
	Dear Ms. Fennell:
	The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) appreciates the opportunity to review and respond to the Government Accountability Office (GAO)-15-79 draft report, "Federal Paid Administrative Leave – Additional Guidance Needed to Improve OPM Data" dated October 2014.
	USDA generally agrees with the findings in the GAO draft report. The management of Federal paid administrative leave would greatly benefit from additional guidance to agencies and payroll providers from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Given the high costs to taxpayers, it is important that each Federal agency increase its accountability and improve its stewardship of the use of paid administrative leave.
	Although the United States Department of Agriculture already has a solid Departmental Regulation for the use of administrative leave and excused absence, we nevertheless will take a leadership role to review our own stewardship of paid administrative leave and will work proactively with OPM in the development of more effective guidance and accountability.
	Thank you again for the opportunity to review and respond to the GAO draft report.
	Best regards,
	Will P. Wills f.
	William P. Milton, Jr., Chief Human Capital Officer Office of Human Resources Management

Appendix VI: Comments from the Department of Defense

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE DEFENSE CIVILIAN PERSONNEL ADVISORY SERVICE 4800 MARK CENTER DRIVE ALEXANDRIA, VA 22350-1100 Ms. Yvonne D. Jones Director, Strategic Issues U.S. Government Accountability Office OCT - 8 2014 441 G Street, NW Washington, DC 20548 Dear Ms. Jones, This letter is in response to your September 19, 2014, letter to the Secretary of Defense under which you provided a draft copy of your proposed report entitled Federal Paid Administrative Leave: Additional Guidance Needed to Improve OPM Data (GAO 15-79). I am providing the Department of Defense response in the enclosure. I am providing the Department of Defense response in the enclosure. Department comments address various aspects of the report, and seek to enhance context, add clarity, and affirm agency discretion in granting or placing personnel on paid administrative leave. The Department response also includes suggestions regarding clear delineation between nondiscretionary and discretionary categories of paid administrative leave, and consideration for the utility of paid administrative leave to employees in coping with situations either beyond their control or abnormal occurrences in their work lives. I trust the information provided will be useful as you finalize this report. I appreciate the opportunity to provide this information. Questions may be addressed to Mr. Jim Davey, Chief, Pay and Classification Branch, Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service, at james.m.davey2.civ@mail.mil or (571) 372-1695. Sincerely, Olhorah Breining Deborah Breining Acting Director, Human Resources Operational Programs and Advisory Services Enclosure: As stated



Appendix VII: Comments from the Department of Veterans Affairs

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS WASHINGTON DC 20420 October 2, 2014 Ms. Yvonne D. Jones Director, Strategic Issues U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, NW Washington, DC 20548 Dear Ms. Jones: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reviewed the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report, "FEDERAL PAID ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE: Additional Guidance Needed to Improve OPM Data" (GAO-15-79). VA generally agrees with GAO's conclusions and concurs with GAO's recommendations. The enclosure provides general comments to the draft report. VA appreciates the opportunity to comment on your draft report. Sincerely, Jose D. Ríojas Chief of Staff

Enclosure			
Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Response to Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report "FEDERAL PAID ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE: Additional Guidance Needed to <i>Improve OPM Data"</i> (GAO-15-79)			
General Comment:			
The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reviewing its policies that govern how it approves and charges paid administrative leave. VA will coordinate with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to ensure consistency with their interpretation of when administrative leave is appropriate. VA is preparing to implement a new time-keeping system known as the VA Time and Attendance System (VATAS), which will centralize, streamline, and standardize VA's timekeeping practices, records, and reporting. VATAS will allow VA to refine how it records such things as official time for union activities, training, and temporary duty. VATAS will also provide opportunities for VA to document specific reasons for the appropriate charge of paid administrative leave (i.e., pending agency investigations, inclement weather, voting, etc.).			

Appendix VIII: GAO Contacts

GAO Contacts	Yvonne D. Jones (202) 512-2717 or jonesy@gao.gov
Acknowledgments	In addition to the contact named above, Steven Lozano, Assistant Director; Sara Daleski; Karin Fangman; Shelby Kain; Cynthia Saunders; Erin Saunders Rath; Rebecca Shea; and Carolyn Taylor made key contributions to this report. Jeff DeMarco, Mary Diop, Deirdre Duffy, Ellen Grady, Ulyana Panchishin, Robert Robinson, and Jeffrey Schmerling also provided assistance.

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Public Affairs	Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800 U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149 Washington, DC 20548