



GSA Public Buildings Service

June 19, 2015

Jason W. Olsen
President
Federal Employees with Disabilities
P.O. Box 2185
Montgomery Village, MD 20886

Dear Mr. Olsen,

I am writing in response to your June 7, 2015 letter to President Obama on behalf of employees with disabilities at the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department Health and Human Services (HHS). Your message expressed concern over "...the GSA open office policy and how its implementation in the agency's move to the Mary Switzer Building will impact their capacity to perform their jobs to the best of their ability."

GSA is dedicated to implementing and integrating the requirements of the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. Our agency equally provides all necessary accommodations to Federal employees with disabilities as required by Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and it has actively participated in the United States Access Board since its founding by the Rehabilitation Act. We also fully support President Obama's Executive Order 13548 mandate that "the Federal Government must become a model for the employment of individuals with disabilities."

GSA treats the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) footprint-reduction targets with similar urgency. OMB has instructed Federal agencies to reduce per-capita square footage for all building types. In addition, Federal agencies are required to develop an office design standard by March 2016, which should optimize the Federal real property portfolio as replacement takes place.

We pursue physical accessibility and the dignity of all Federal employees with the same rigor as we do our commitment to providing value to American taxpayers. As a result, our solutions for achieving workplace efficiency are not one-size-fits-all. They are tailored to each partner agency's mission and operations, and accomplished through due diligence.

That research is extensive. When developing an individual workplace strategy, GSA encourages input from across the partner agency, and it maximizes such participation through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and strategy reviews. As per Executive Order 13548, this effort yields workplaces that facilitate recruitment, retention, advancement, and equality of all Federal workers.

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In the Switzer Building, for example, GSA and the architect worked with all five occupant groups throughout the course of this project, allowing users to review and provide feedback at all design reviews. An accessibility consultant supported the architect. In turn, offices range in size between 120 square feet and 240 square feet, and workstations range between 48 and 56 square feet. Due to ACL's high accessibility needs, the interior designed for it has 172 workspaces, of which 39 are enclosed offices (22 percent).

Moreover, in February 2014 GSA and the architect held a furniture visioning session with HHS Operating Divisions and the HHS Union, to review the final furniture designs for workstations and offices. Spatial and furniture designs have consistently met and exceeded Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standard requirements, even though furniture does not typically have to meet the benchmark. HHS and the union approved the furniture in spring 2014.

HHS has been a strong partner in achieving workplace efficiency. OMB's fiscal-responsibility directives predate the Switzer Building consolidation, and GSA has frequently collaborated with HHS at both national and regional levels to implement them. The United States Access Board also supports GSA's work in this realm. Indeed, the board largely responded favorably to "Reasonable Accommodations in a Hoteling Environment"—our recent presentation about optimizing office resources via design—and an accompanying tour of our new open-office headquarters.

GSA enjoys this wide-ranging support, precisely because we do not have a specific open office policy. Rather, we work toward workplace efficiency through intensely customized agency engagements. I hope this information provides insight into these processes, and underscores our concern for employees with disabilities. Please feel free to contact me for additional information.

Sincerely,



Norman Dong
Commissioner

cc: Ned Holland, Assistant Secretary - HHS