

October 11, 2024

Marc-Olivier Girard
Clerk of the committee
Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

By email: OGGO@parl.gc.ca

Re: Call for investigation into return-to-office policies and impact on productivity

Dear Mr. Girard,

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE), which represents over 27,000 federal public sector employees across Canada. We are urging the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates (OGGO) to undertake a comprehensive investigation into the impact of the federal government's return-to-office (RTO) policies on federal employee's productivity and ability to deliver. We are greatly concerned that we are witnessing the erosion of excellence due to poorly designed and implemented workplace policies.

→ CAPE data reports widespread RTO failure:

CAPE has been collecting a high volume of data through membership surveys and consultations on the impact of the various RTO policies rolled out in recent months by the federal government. The outlook is grim: federal public sector employees are facing unprecedented turmoil in the workplace. If the failures of Canada Life or of the Phoenix pay system weren't enough to make the federal government one of the least attractive employers in the country, the government's reluctance to offer remote work flexibility may well solidify that perception.

The government's recent three-day return-to-office policy has proven ineffective for thousands of our members. Promoted as a means to enhance collaboration, many employees find themselves commuting to the office only to participate in MS Teams meetings with colleagues located in different parts of the building, city, or even across the country.

→ Productivity is falling behind due to infrastructural challenges:

Productivity has been raised as an argument to rush employees back to their offices. Yet, pre-pandemic federal office infrastructure and physical office spaces are simply no longer there. Therefore, the transition to mandatory office attendance has been fraught with distractions and inefficiencies due to limited office space, a cumbersome hotelling booking system - where it exists, and frequent relocations. These are not optimal conditions for employees to be productive.

→ New surveillance encroaching on privacy, affecting morale:

New office presence surveillance systems and practices are raising very serious concerns about privacy. The introduction of policing tasks into senior employees' performance objectives are burdening them with the uncomfortable role of policing their colleagues' office presence instead of focusing their attention on delivering projects that should benefit Canadians. This level of monitoring is going too far, as it creates an atmosphere of mistrust, undermining employee

confidence and stifling creativity. Employees may feel constantly scrutinized, which can lead to increased stress and a diminished sense of autonomy.

➔ **Health and safety put on the back burner:**

Many offices have been neglecting fundamental health and safety principles. Some designated shared workspaces are not properly equipped to meet these standards. This lack of compliance is frustrating staff, who feel their concerns are being overlooked in the rush to meet arbitrary deadlines. Also, there is a growing disconnect between the operational needs of departments and the mental health and work-life balance of employees. This could result in higher absenteeism, lower productivity, and greater turnover, ultimately compromising the quality of public service delivery.

Given these and many other concerns, CAPE strongly believes that OGGO is well-positioned to undertake a thorough review of the return-to-office policies. Such a study should evaluate its implementation, assess how managers are addressing operational and employee well-being challenges, and propose recommendations to address well founded concerns. The results of this study could help inform future policies, fostering a more sustainable, fair, and effective workplace environment to modernize the public sector.

➔ **Call for investigation**

We call on the investigation to focus on the following key issues which have emerged from a recent membership survey:

1. **Insufficient Workspaces:** There is a lack of available desks and workspaces, leading to overcrowding.
2. **Health and Safety Violations:** Many desks and offices are dirty, and the overall air quality is poor, contributing to unsanitary conditions.
3. **Privacy Concerns from Unprecedented Surveillance Measures:** The introduction of new surveillance measures that potentially encroach on employees' privacy and distract managers from critical project management tasks, shifting focus away from more important responsibilities.
4. **Noisy Office Environment:** The noise levels in the office are disruptive, with few quiet spaces for focused work. The busy atmosphere makes it difficult for employees to concentrate, further exacerbating the challenges of productivity.
5. **Inadequate Equipment:** The current hotelling system limits access to necessary equipment, such as monitors and ergonomic setups, hindering employee comfort and efficiency.
6. **Limited Meeting and Collaboration Spaces:** There is a shortage of meeting rooms and collaborative areas, which restricts in-person teamwork.
7. **Insufficient Lockers:** There are not enough lockers available, and those that exist are often too small to accommodate personal belongings.
8. **Impact on Stress and Anxiety:** Employees frequently experience stress and anxiety due to the struggle to find workspace, unreliable booking systems, and a general lack of resources.
9. **Work-Life Imbalance:** These conditions contribute to an unhealthy work-life balance for employees.
10. **Employee Morale:** Overall, the current working conditions have a negative impact on employee morale, further affecting our workplace culture.

I urge you to investigate these matters promptly to ensure a healthier and more productive working environment for all employees.

We look forward to your response and will gladly provide additional information or participate as a witness.

Yours sincerely,

Nathan Prier

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Prier', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

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