February 8, 2019

Senator Mark Warner  
703 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Warner,

The International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) wants to express its support for your legislation (S. 198), the “Stop the Shutdowns Transferring Unnecessary Pain and Inflicting Damage in the Coming Years Act.”

Our strong preference is for all of the appropriations bills to be enacted prior to the start of the fiscal year. Given that Congress has not passed all of the appropriations bills prior to the start of the fiscal year since 1996, it is important that a law be enacted to ensure continuing appropriations. The vital services that government provides to the country are too important to go through the disruption that results from government shutdowns. The suffering of federal employees, contractors, and those who rely on government services that result from government shutdowns should not be allowed to occur again. The economic impact of the recent shutdown which the Congressional Budget Office estimated at $11 billion, with $3 billion in permanent damage is another negative impact that should be avoided in the future.

As an association of public sector human resource professionals, we are especially concerned with the impact that a government shutdown has on the brand of the federal government as an employer. During the recent shutdown, federal employees who were deemed essential were forced to work without being paid. Other federal employees were deemed “non-essential”, a terrible label to put on employees, and not allowed to work. At a time of rapid change, increased retirements of baby boomers, low unemployment, and an increasingly complex mission, it is important that government be able to compete for the best and brightest talent. Based on 2017 data from the Office of Personnel Management, less than 6% of the federal workforce is under the age of 30, which is a much lower percentage than in the private sector. The federal government needs to make itself an employer of choice for younger workers and this will not occur as long as the cloud of a shutdown hangs over the federal government.

The impact of the recent government shutdown can be seen in two recent Gallup surveys which found:
• Americans are most likely to cite the government/poor leadership as the most important problem facing the country and in January, there was a 10 percentage point increase over December in those citing government as the most important problem.
• Americans' trust in government to handle problems is now at an all-time low and there has been a ten point drop in the percent of Americans in the past four months who say they have a great deal or a fair amount of trust and confidence in the US government’s ability to deal with domestic issues.

The National Academy of Public Administration in its 2018 report “Building a Public Service for the 21st Century” pointed out the need for the federal government to act now to start building the workforce the government needs. The report concludes “To govern effectively, government must have the capacity to govern. The bedrock of that capacity is its workforce.” The 2018 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government rankings found that employee engagement declined at almost 60% of federal organizations, with only 40% showing increases. One can only wonder about how much employee engagement will decline in this year’s survey, especially at those agencies that were impacted by the recent shutdown.

Thank you for introducing this important legislation. Please do not hesitate to have your staff contact me if IPMA-HR can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Neil Reichenberg
Executive Director