

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 11, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write to express deep concern about Reductions in Force (RIFs) at the State Department and to seek clarification on the Trump administration's RIF process. RIFs should remain a tool of last resort, and if implemented must be conducted according to long-standing procedures that prioritize transparency and a merit-based process for both career civil service employees and Foreign Service Officers (FSOs). During a time of increasingly complex and wide-spread challenges to U.S. national security, this administration should be strengthening our diplomatic corps—an irreplaceable instrument of U.S. power and leadership—not weakening it. However, RIFs would severely undermine the Department's ability to achieve U.S. foreign policy interests, putting our nation's security, strength, and prosperity at risk.

Already, our diplomatic corps has suffered significant and destabilizing losses this year. Nearly 25 percent of the Foreign Service has left the Department since January through agency closures, early retirement, and strategic buyouts. Despite an increase in worldwide diplomatic vacancies, including many hard-to-fill positions located in remote or dangerous posts, as many as 3,000 domestically assigned State Department employees may be fired, including over 700 D.C.-based FSOs, as part of the Department's proposed reorganization. All FSO assignment panels, including for open positions that require immediate staffing, some of which already have selected candidates, have been frozen. Moreover, recent unilateral changes to the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) indicate that the RIF process may ignore the Foreign Service's unique status as a mobile global workforce, while also ignoring the Department's professional development guidelines established by the first Trump administration requiring FSO generalists to serve in a mixture of domestic roles in more than one bureau. Instead, it appears the Department plans to fire FSOs based solely on their current domestic assignments, without consideration of merit-based performance indicators or potential for lateral reassignments to vacant, must-fill posts.

State Department civil service employees are also at risk of elimination through the Trump administration's RIF process based solely on their current assignment and are being stopped from making lateral moves to positions they've already been selected for within the Department. These bureaucratic obstacles seem designed to maximize the number of RIFs, rather than ensuring civil servants with knowledge and talent critical to the successful functioning of the Department are retained. This approach fundamentally undermines the professionalism of the Civil and Foreign Service by gutting expertise, destroying institutional memory, hobbling sensitive negotiations, and potentially limiting assistance to American citizens overseas.

While every administration is entitled to set new priorities and engage in reorganization of executive agencies, we are deeply concerned by the breadth of these RIFs and the lack of clarity and transparency of the Department's RIF process. As a result, we request a response to the following questions by no later than July 18, 2025:

RIF Criteria:

- 1) When were RIF lists created, by whom, and against what criteria?
- 2) Is the Department choosing to RIF based on current office assignment rather than globally ranking FSOs and civil servants based on grade and skillsets? If so, why?
- 3) Are the lists being updated to reflect Permanent Changes in Station (PCS) or curtailments?
- 4) How many veterans and consular coned generalists are included on the list?
- 5) It can take years of training for an FSO or civil servant to master diplomatic and negotiation skills, including obtaining fluency in critical languages. Why are skilled officers, including those with specialized language skills not being reassigned? How will the Department fill these specialized skill and experience gaps?

Foreign Service Officers:

- 6) Why is the administration preventing FSOs from transferring into critical vacancies?
- 7) Why is the administration preventing candidates who accepted a "handshake" from being paneled into a position they were chosen for based on merit?
- 8) What is the rationale for conducting RIFs before the reorganization takes effect?
- 9) How many vacant FSO positions will there be worldwide after RIFs are processed? How does the Department plan to fill mission critical posts?
- 10) Why is the Department processing RIFs prior to determining the number of vacant positions remaining following your reorganization efforts?
- 11) How is the Department protecting the pipeline of FSOs to ensure no critical skill gaps in the future?

Civil Service:

- 12) Civil service employees often come to the Department with specialized experience. How is the Department working to retain critical, hard to replace employees in the civil service?
- 13) How is the Department working to ensure key specialties, knowledge, and personnel are retained and transferred during the reorganization?

- 14) Why is the Department refusing to process any lateral moves by civil service employees who have been offered other civil service positions within the Department?
- 15) If reducing waste, fraud, and abuse is the goal of the reorganization, why is the Department not efficiently allowing these experienced civil service employees to laterally move into vacant positions they were chosen for based on merit?
- 16) If remaining civil service officers are going to be asked to take on additional work, how will they be remunerated for their time and effort?
- 17) Will the hiring and lateral transition freezes be lifted once RIFs are complete?

Reassignment Process:

- 18) Will there be a competitive reassignment for high-performing, mission-critical personnel following the RIFs? If so, what is the timeline and criteria for this reassignment process? How will the Department communicate these details with its employees?

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



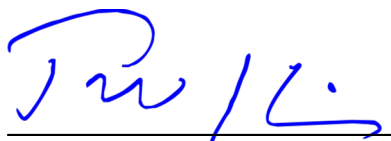
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



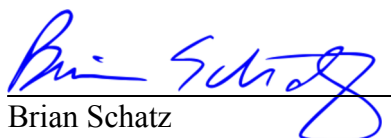
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



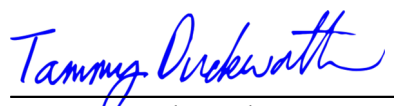
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



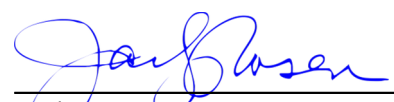
Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Russell Vought, Director of the Office of Management and Budget