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**Before the
Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
United States House of Representatives**

**on
“Oversight of Federal Agencies’ Post-Pandemic Telework Policies.”**

September 14, 2023

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Mfume, and Members of the Subcommittee, it is a privilege to appear before you today to discuss the National Science Foundation’s telework policies and practices. My name is Dr. Karen Marrongelle, and I am the Chief Operating Officer for the National Science Foundation.

Established by the National Science Foundation Act of 1950 (P.L. 81-507), the National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent federal agency charged with the mission “to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense; and for other purposes.” NSF is unique in carrying out its mission by supporting research across all fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and at all levels of STEM education. NSF investments contribute significantly to the economic and national security interests of the Nation, and development of a future-focused science and engineering workforce that draws on the talents of all Americans. Over the past seven decades, NSF has delivered incredible value for the Nation.

At this time of intense global competition for leadership in technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum information science, NSF remains committed to building upon these successful investments and furthering breakthroughs in science, engineering, and technology to ensure that the United States remains the global leader in innovation well into the future.

Our ability to achieve this is rooted in sustained support by Congress, the ingenuity and perseverance of the research enterprise, and the dedicated employees who serve in varying capacities throughout NSF. Almost the entire NSF workforce of approximately 1,600 employees is stationed in Alexandria, Virginia. Of this number, more than 1,300 are in telework-eligible positions and more than 1,000 are utilizing that flexibility. We also have a significant number of

staff who come to the agency on a temporary basis from around the country – looking for an opportunity to serve their country and to advance NSF’s mission. Through rotator programs, NSF is able to tap experts in their fields to help the agency find the most promising investments in the future of science, engineering, and technology.

For many years NSF has shown that we can embrace telework and flexibility while continuing to excel as the Nation’s investor in exploratory, discovery-driven research and use-inspired innovations. NSF has had strong telework policies and practices in place since 2004, with over 90% of staff utilizing telework flexibilities prior to the pandemic in 2019. It was NSF investments in telework over time – both in the technology that underpins it and the training of staff and supervisors to ensure it is productive – that allowed the agency to pivot quickly to a virtual environment during the pandemic without seeing a reduction in productivity.

NSF funds research and education in most fields of science and engineering. It does this through grants and cooperative agreements to approximately 3,000 institutions of higher education, K-12 school systems, businesses, informal science organizations, and other research organizations throughout the United States. NSF reviews approximately 40,000 proposals each year for research, education, and training projects, of which approximately 11,000 are funded. Those funding decisions are rooted in NSF’s world-renowned merit-review process, which uses panels of experts in their fields for peer review of scientific proposals.

The total number of proposal reviews conducted (including written reviews, panel summaries, and site visit reports), as well as proposals evaluated in the merit review process, increased each year from FY 2019 through FY 2021 and decreased in FY 2022, all in line with the change in total proposals received by NSF. Similarly, the total number of new NSF awards peaked in 2020 with over 12,000 award actions. During this time the NSF staff was able to consistently meet the increased proposal pressure while operating under a maximum telework posture. In FY 2022, the number of new NSF awards returned to the pre-pandemic baseline of approximately 11,000. The number of active awards NSF staff manage has continued to grow since prior to the pandemic – from 54,000 in FY 2019 to 58,000 in FY 2022.

Last year, NSF updated our telework policy and added remote work options for a small number of positions. In addition, the agency extended a temporary full-time telework option in 90-day increments to NSF staff to help transition to a hybrid environment. With the declared end of the public health emergency in May 2023, NSF has been taking this unique opportunity to reimagine a collaborative work posture in a hybrid environment. Over the past year, our dedicated professionals across our human resources, information technology, and legal teams have put in tremendous effort to shape our future work approach, while carefully listening to the diverse range of expressions and opinions from our staff. Over the last several months, NSF – like all agencies – has been reevaluating its work environment posture in response to OMB Memo 23-15 and making adjustments to promote organizational health and organizational performance. Similar to other agencies, NSF announced that, effective October 23, 2023, all NSF employees in telework-eligible positions are expected to report onsite at NSF headquarters for a minimum of four days per pay period. Doing so allows the agency to meet the expectations of our stakeholders and preserve our culture of collaboration, while ensuring that we meet business needs while maintaining flexibility. To ensure our path is well-guided, we will consistently assess our

organizational health and performance metrics to help guide our policies and workplace environment.

The entire NSF leadership team is incredibly proud of the agency's workforce and the dedication they show to the NSF mission. We are also honored that, for the past two years, NSF staff has ranked the agency 2nd out of 27 midsize agencies in the Partnership for Public Service's Best Places to Work in Government. Finally, we take great pride in being innovators, both in how we drive the frontiers of science and engineering, and how we get our work done to meet the needs of the Nation. NSF is committed to working hard to remain a leader in both.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. With the continued support of this Committee and Congress, and by building upon the CHIPS and Science Act, NSF stands ready to strengthen our national and economic security and create innovation anywhere and opportunities everywhere.