

Establishing Data Standards and Measuring Building Use: Select Provisions of the Telework Transparency Act of 2024 (S. 4043)

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On March 21, 2024, Senator Gary Peters introduced the Telework Transparency Act of 2024 ([S. 4043](#)). The bill, cosponsored by Senator Joni Ernst, was referred to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on the same day, and no further action has been taken. S. 4043 would require federal agencies to monitor their employees' use of telework and to collect and publicly report telework-related data. This Insight discusses selected provisions that relate to telework data standards, including office building utilization data.

Select Telework Data Provisions

S. 4043 includes several provisions that would involve the use of data to monitor federal telework. The [Office of Personnel Management \(OPM\)](#) would be required to establish [data standards](#) that would (1) enable the tracking of telework usage within payroll systems; (2) permit data collection by OPM for its reporting to Congress under [Title 5, Section 6506, of the U.S. Code](#); and (3) support an online tool to present the telework data that is to be reported by agencies. OPM may choose to fulfill its reporting requirements to Congress through the online tool. If S. 4043 were enacted, OPM would have two years to develop an online tool that would make standardized telework data publicly available.

OPM currently has [data standards](#) for human resources, payroll, and training data, including some standards for telework data contained in payroll records. OPM describes its [data standards program](#) as “providing standardized definitions and characteristics for federal civilian employment data elements across a wide range of customers to facilitate the collection, processing, use, and dissemination of such data.” While OPM oversees these data standards, [agencies use the data standards](#) for [human resources reporting](#), including to transmit telework-related data to OPM. Reported data are part of OPM’s [Enterprise Human Resources Integration \(EHRI\)](#) data warehouse. OPM calls the [EHRI data warehouse](#) a “premier source for integrated Federal workforce information. The system currently collects, integrates, and publishes data for 2.0 million Executive Branch employees on a bi-weekly basis, supporting agency and governmentwide analytics.”

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For FY2024, OPM expected agencies to begin reporting on a category separate from telework called *remote work* in which employees do not regularly return to agency worksites during each pay period. OPM's memorandum to agencies on remote work data reporting suggests that implementing new data requirements within systems provided by various shared service providers may involve long lead times.

In 2022, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported on OPM's long-standing challenges related to monitoring errors in agencies' telework data reporting, establishing internal controls for telework data quality, and integrating payroll data into the EHRI data warehouse. As a result of these issues, GAO found that OPM's annual reporting to Congress does not precisely assess telework usage across agencies. S. 4043 would potentially address these concerns by requiring OPM to establish processes for ensuring data quality, including conformity to the data standards, and for providing feedback to agencies.

Building Utilization Data

S. 4043 would require agencies to establish methods for measuring the impact of telework on office building space utilization. Agencies are currently required to identify and dispose of building space that is underutilized (partly empty) or unutilized (vacant) in order to avoid unnecessary operating, maintenance, and rental costs. However, agencies have struggled to identify and dispose of underutilized and unutilized space in a timely manner, despite the implementation of legislation and executive branch initiatives designed to streamline disposition. Recent studies suggest that building utilization rates have fallen to record lows as a result of expanded telework opportunities—in some cases below 10% of capacity—and that agencies lack appropriate benchmarks for measuring utilization rates in high-telework environments.

To address these issues, S. 4043 would require OMB, in coordination with the General Services Administration (GSA) and the Federal Real Property Council (FRPC), to:

- develop benchmarks for measuring office building space utilization that account for the use of telework,
- issue guidance to executive agencies for collecting occupancy data regarding the average daily onsite attendance for each building they own or lease, and
- establish for each executive agency a building space utilization rate goal of at least 60%.

Agencies would be required to establish systems that track office building utilization rates and to report those rates in their annual budget justifications. GAO would be required to audit agencies' office building utilization rates, along with other telework data. Agencies would also be required to establish indicators of how telework affects the cost of operations and the management of real and personal property. OMB, in coordination with OPM and GSA, would be required to issue guidance on developing these and other indicators. Agency heads would be required to report on their ability to dispose of or consolidate underutilized property and on the steps they have taken or plan to take to meet their target utilization rates.

Issues for Congress

Given GAO's previous reporting on OPM's data integration challenges and its other reporting on applying data standards to authoritative online sources of federal data, Congress may consider expanding GAO's role in S. 4043 to evaluate the implementation of telework data standards and the ability of OPM to integrate telework data in the EHRI data warehouse.

A recent analysis by the Public Buildings Reform Board (PBRB)—an independent body that develops disposal recommendations under a real property pilot program—concluded that the government may

realize the greatest cost and space reductions through consolidation projects. Some agencies have [opposed consolidating space](#) because telework policies might change in the future, resulting in more employees working on site. Congress may consider directing the FRPC and the PBRB to develop a methodology that agencies could use to identify consolidation opportunities while taking potential telework policy changes into account.

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