

## Medici, Andrea

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**From:** Medici, Andrea  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 4, 2021 5:21 PM  
**To:** Regan, Michael; McCabe, Janet  
**Cc:** Utech, Dan; Brown, Phil; Sarah Riger; Al-Mudallal, Amer; Lynne, Diane; Hoppe, Allison  
**Subject:** Open Letter to Senior Leadership

**Importance:** High

May 4, 2021

Dear Administrator Regan and Deputy Administrator McCabe,

I am writing as the Chief Steward of NTEU Chapter 280 at EPA/HQ to call your attention to a serious issue regarding the health and well-being of your employees. For over a year, and despite clear guidance and directions from the Office of Personnel Management and the White House, many EPA supervisors and managers have not exercised maximum flexibility for the sake of their employees, many of whom have suffered illness, loss, and financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I do not mean telework, sick leave, or schedule flexibility. I mean demonstrating respect for an employee by acknowledging the pandemic's impacts on work product or performance. The negative treatment of many employees has continued, even since the January 2021 change of presidential administration.

Throughout the pandemic, EPA's leaders and managers have repeatedly praised the success of our sudden shift to almost universal remote work settings in spite of the many significant challenges created by the pandemic. Employees who may have been accustomed to teleworking on an occasional basis were suddenly forced to telework while sharing living space and internet bandwidth with several other family members working and attending school online at the same time. A whole new layer of stress was added to all of our lives, affecting physical and mental health alike. As many managers have stated publicly, it is astounding how well EPA continued to fulfill its mission under such unprecedented circumstances.

However, behind this overall success story, individual employees have struggled to meet supervisors' expectations regarding their (often excessive) workload. Notwithstanding the public declarations of success, many individual employees were told in their October 2020 performance appraisals and April 2021 progress reviews that supervisors or managers were disappointed that the employees were sometimes less productive, less responsive, or less effective at parts of their jobs during this period. These comments resulted from employees' struggles to deal with pandemic challenges and burdens from every direction at once. Some of the events that occurred in these employees' lives included: contracting COVID-19; living with someone who contracted COVID-19; losing both parents to COVID-19; losing as many as five family members to COVID-19; single-parenthood (full custody) of four children in school (virtual learning) due to divorce from a physically abusive spouse; other serious health conditions, including cancer, requiring surgery, treatment, and hospitalization; and more. These supervisors clearly stated that their performance expectations are not changed in any way by the individual's difficulties. This is a small set of real examples from a handful of employees at HQ who have related their stories to me. The lack of compassion and support for the struggles of fellow human beings, much less for employees who depend on their managers for their very livelihood, was discouraging up until January 19, 2021; it is downright disturbing now, more than 100 days later.

It is critical to restoring trust between EPA's staff and management that employees receive supportive treatment from their supervisors across the board. I believe that this can only happen if you, at the very top, acknowledge

the issue and take immediate action to hold supervisors accountable for applying compassion along with flexibility to their expectations of employees' performance in the face of the worst public health crisis in over a century. I would like to meet with you, even for a short video call, to discuss what steps would effectively convey to all EPA's managers the need to act consistently with the values expressed in Administrator Regan's compassionate email to employees after the death of Daunte Wright:

Let me say this: it's OK to not be OK right now. We cannot separate ourselves from the harsh, all too often cruel, realities of the world – and I do not expect you to.

Your employees want to build EPA back better, and to do that we need leaders who care more about our lives than about our deadlines. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

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The measure of a country's greatness is its ability to retain compassion in times of crisis. -Thurgood Marshall, US Supreme Court Justice (2 Jul 1908-1993)