OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Assessment of the Commission's Family-Friendly Programs

Inspection Report
OIG-IR-06-01

UNITED STATES
INTERNATIONAL
TRADE COMMISSION

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I. INTRODUCTION

Recent legislation and presidential directives[1] have emphasized the importance of a family-friendly workplace, allowing federal employees to balance career demands with personal and family obligations. As family-friendly programs[2] have begun, government managers have seen benefits not only to employees but also to the morale and productivity of organizations.

While family-friendly programs are not without cost, the cost can be mitigated by reduced employee turnover, thereby reducing inefficiency due to vacancies. The U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC or Commission) enjoys a relatively low turnover rate[3] but faces the challenge of prospective increased retirements over the next 5 years.

II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this inspection was to assess the Commission's family-friendly programs in terms of their compliance with statutory and executive level guidance and whether they meet the needs of Commission employees.

III. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To accomplish the objective, we reviewed statutes and presidential directives relating to family-friendly policies and programs as well as information provided by OPM's Family-Friendly Advocacy Office on the wide variety of family-friendly programs available to federal agencies. We also reviewed Commission directives, orders and other documentation relating to the Commission's implementation of family-friendly programs. We interviewed the Commission's Director and Assistant Director of Personnel to obtain their views and observations on the Commission's family-friendly programs. Finally, we surveyed Commission employees to determine their interest in these programs.

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[1] Efforts to create a "Family-Friendly" workplace for federal employees received impetus from a series of presidential directives issued during the 1990's. Also during that period, Congress passed several laws relating to childcare, family leave and other family- friendly initiatives. In 1998, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) created an Office of Family-Friendly Advocacy to promote family-friendly programs within federal agencies.

[2] For purposes of this report, "family-friendly programs" are those programs promoted by OPM's Office of Family-Friendly Advocacy.

[3] OPM compiles employment turnover statistics for selected federal agencies. Among the 22 independent agencies it surveys in the Washington Metropolitan area, the Federal Emergency Management Agency had the highest turnover rate in fiscal year 2000 of 20.03 percent, while the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission had the lowest rate of 5.81 percent. The average turnover rate for the Commission over the past 3 fiscal years has been about 9.3 percent. If the ITC had been included in the OPM survey (it was not), this turnover rate would have ranked as the sixth lowest among independent agencies.

Our inspection was conducted June 14, 2001 through February 28, 2002, in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections of the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

IV. FINDINGS

The Commission has implemented 13 out of 14 family-friendly programs considered mandatory for federal employees and 4 of 8 programs considered voluntary. Seventy-seven percent of employees responding to our survey said that the Commission is "a family-friendly place to work." Although the Commission's success is commendable, employee survey results and our inspection identified opportunities for the Commission to further enhance family-friendly programs, as will be discussed below.

Table 1 lists common family-friendly programs, indicating whether they are mandatory or voluntary for federal employees and based on presidential, statutory or OPM direction. As shown, the Commission has implemented all programs considered mandatory for federal employees except Parent and Elder Care Support Groups. As further shown in Table 1, the Commission has implemented all programs considered voluntary except (1) a Voluntary Leave Bank, (2) an On-Site Childcare Center, (3) Low Income Childcare Tuition, and (4) Student Loan Repayment.

Table 1. ITC Implementation of Available Programs

PROGRAM TYPE	VOLUNTARY OR MANDATORY	ITC PROGRAM
Family-Friendly Leave Programs		
Family and Medical Leave - 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a newborn child, adopted child or a seriously ill family member or own serious health condition (5 USC 6381-6387; 5 CFR 630.1201–630.1211)	Mandatory	Yes
Paid Family and Medical Leave - 12 weeks of paid annual or sick leave instead of unpaid leave to care for a newborn child, adopted child, a seriously ill family member, or own serious health condition (5 USC 6382; 5 CFR 630.1205)	Mandatory	Yes
Family Member Care - 104 hours of accrued sick leave in a year to care for an ill family member or arrange/attend a family member's funeral (5 USC 6307; 5 CFR 630.913)	Mandatory	Yes
Voluntary Transfers of Leave (5USC 6331-6340; 5 CFR 630.901–630.401)	Mandatory	Yes
Voluntary Leave Bank (5 USC 6361-6373; 5 CFR 630.1001-630.1016)	Voluntary	No
Alternative Work Schedules		
Compressed Work Schedules (5 USC 6120-6133; 5 CFR 610.401-610.408)	Voluntary	Yes
Flexible Work Schedules (5 USC 6120-6133; 5 CFR 610.401-610.408)	Voluntary	Yes
Part-Time Employment (5 USC 3401-3408; 5 CFR 340.101, 340.201-340.204)	Mandatory*	Yes
Job Sharing (5 USC 3401-3408; 5 CFR 340.101, 340.201-340.204)	Mandatory*	Yes
Telecommuting (Public Law 106-346, Section 359, 2000)	Mandatory	Yes
Childcare		
On-site Childcare Centers (40 USC 490b)	Voluntary	No
Childcare Tuition Costs – Agency use of appropriated funds for Childcare costs for lower income employees [PL 106-58, Section 643 (1999); 5 CFR 792.200-792.235]	Voluntary	No
Childcare Information & Referral Service (Presidential Memo, May 24, 1999)	Mandatory*	Yes
Parent and Elder Care Support Groups (Presidential Memo, May 24, 1999)	Mandatory*	No
On-site Nursing Mothers' Program (Presidential Memo, May 24, 1999)	Mandatory*	Yes
Student Loan Repayment Program (5 USC 5379)	Voluntary	No
Training and Educational Assistance (5 USC 4101-4119; 5 CFR 4101-4119)	Voluntary	Yes
Employee Health Services (5 USC 7901)	Voluntary	Yes
Employee Assistance Program (5 USC 7904; Executive Order 12564, dated September 17, 1986)	Mandatory	Yes
Elder Care Information & Referral Service (Presidential Memo, May 24, 1999)	Mandatory*	Yes
Adoption Benefits - Sick Leave for Adoption (5 USC 6307; 6381-6387; 5 CFR 630.1201-630.1211)	Mandatory	Yes
Transportation Subsidy Program (5 USC 7905; Executive Order 13150, dated April 21, 2000)	Mandatory*	Yes

*Indicates programs directed by presidential memoranda to heads of executive agencies.

Following is a discussion of these family-friendly programs and the results of our survey of Commission employees' family-friendly needs.

A. Family-Friendly Work Arrangements

The Commission successfully has implemented all family-friendly programs associated with work arrangements. Survey respondents indicated that flexible work schedules were their ***first*** priority (See Table 5 on Page 19). A July 11, 1994 presidential memorandum directed agency heads to establish a program to encourage and support the expansion of flexible family-friendly work arrangements, including job sharing, career part-time employment and alternative work schedules.

Alternative work schedules include both flexible work schedules and compressed work schedules. A flexible work schedule is a work schedule established under 5 USC 6122 that:

(1) In the case of a full-time employee, has an 80-hour biweekly basic work requirement that allows an employee to determine his or her own schedule within the limits set by the agency; and
(2) In the case of a part-time employee, has a biweekly basic work requirement of less than 80 hours that allows an employee to determine his or her own schedule within the limits set by the agency.

Compressed work schedule means:

(1) In the case of a full-time employee, an 80-hour biweekly basic work requirement that is scheduled by an agency for less than 10 workdays; and
(2) In the case of a part-time employee, a biweekly basic work requirement of less than 80 hours that is scheduled by an agency for less than 10 workdays and that may require the employee to work more than 8 hours in a day. (See 5 USC 6121(5).)

The Commission has implemented both the compressed work schedule and flexible work schedule in Commission Directive 4400.1, Attendance and Leave. Surveyed employees' comments[4] included:

- *I flex. I love it. (Even though because of workload I frequently don't get to take my day off [meaning that I work 88 hours instead of 80] of the 5-4-9).*
- *Providing managers with statistics and other information to convince them that these programs can help, not hinder, the work product [would help].*
- *I would like to see more time given for the death of a family member. The current 3 days is not adequate when an employee has to manage the decedent's estate.*
- *What would really help is flexibility on number of hours worked each day and ability to switch hours as family commitments arrive. For example, I work 9:00-5:30. If I have to take my child to the doctors, say at 4:30, I have to leave at 3:30 and take 2 hours leave. What would make sense for me would be to come in at 7:00 a.m. on that day and leave at 3:30. The current system does not allow this type of flexibility.*
- *[I] think the Commission could allow for the occasional changing of the scheduled day off for workers on Flexible Work Schedule. Many employees try to schedule doctor appointments and other personal business on their day off; however, scheduling an appointment may require a different day than the employee's official day off. Also, [I] would like to see more flexibility in determining the off day when it falls on a holiday.*

[4] For purposes of this report, written comments to the OIG survey have been excerpted and grouped by subject matter. Where comments have been edited or omitted, thought was given to staying within the scope of our inspection and effectively communicating the results in this report. However, the OIG has carefully considered every comment and will consider all comments in planning future audits, inspections and investigations.

[You] currently have to take Friday preceding [the] holiday if you have 2nd Monday off. Why can't the employee pick the day that's best for him/her?

- *Allow leave for family events (graduation, weddings, etc.) no matter what the employee's work schedule due dates. Such events are once in a lifetime family occurrences which parents should be able to attend.*
- *[I would like to see] more flexibility in work schedules. There should be an approved work schedule of 4 10-hour days. Perhaps a floating AWS [Alternative Work Schedule] off day.*
- *The flexible work schedule is important to me since it allows me to set a later arrival/departure time than the normal workday. While this is "manna from heaven" for those of us who are not "morning people," it also provides alternatives for employees with occasional emergencies and the like.*
- *Allowing all employees to take advantage of a compressed work schedule would make the Commission a more family-friendly work place.*
- *The agency needs to offer flextime instead of flexi tour and let employees use ½ hour increments in annual and sick leave.*
- *Wish the Commission would start at 6:00 a.m., for people who travel a distance. [From my home] it takes me 1 hour leaving at 5:45 to be at work on time . . . When I leave at 5:15, I get home after 7:00 p.m. . . .*
- *Extending the core hours of the Commission to allow employees more flexibility [would be helpful]. For example, an employee who works 6:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. would be able to pick up children from school. From my perspective, this would be more important than anything listed [in the OIG survey].*
- *Under alternate or compressed work schedules, [I would like to see] allowing work arrival times as early as 6 a.m., without special justification.*
- *Allow earlier start hours (some other agencies allow work to begin at 6:00 a.m.) so that parents can pick up their kids after school. Allow maximum flexibility for maternity leave! (Most do not have leave to allow for extended time off, and the 12 weeks LWOP [Leave Without Pay] under FMLA [Family and Medical Leave Act] is not long enough when wait lists for daycare in the area are a year long!!).*

As provided for in OPM's implementing regulation (5 CFR 3402), the Commission established a part-time employment program by Administrative Order 81-12, dated October 30,1981. Employees responding to the OIG survey indicated that part-time employment ranked ***fourteenth*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). Comments included:

- *Allow employees to enter retirement gradually: 40 hours week, then telecommute, then shorten workweek, then full retirement.*
- *[It] would be nice if it were easier to work part time without having to find a second part-time [worker] to "job share."*
- *Expanding core hours and part-time options would assist parents with infants and school-age children.*

The Federal Employees Part-Time Career Employment Act of 1978 (PL 95-437) cites these benefits of part-time employment:[5]

(1) Provides parents opportunities to balance family responsibilities with the need for additional income;
(2) Benefits students who must finance their own education or vocational training;
(3) Benefits the government, as an employer, by increasing productivity and job satisfaction, while lowering turnover rates and absenteeism, offering management more flexibility in meeting work requirements, and filling shortages in various occupations; and
(4) Benefits society by offering a needed alternative for those individuals who require or prefer shorter hours (despite the reduced income), thus increasing jobs available to reduce unemployment while retaining the skills of individuals who have training and experience.

B. Employee Health Services

By changing its payment methodology from an annual per capita basis to a fee-for-service basis, the Commission can reduce its employee health services expenses by more than 60 percent. The Commission provides health services to its employees through Federal Occupational Health (FOH), a division of the U.S. Public Health Service in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The health facility serving the Commission is physically located in the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) headquarters building. Services provided to Commission employees include: On-Site First Aid, Immunizations, Physician Prescribed Services, Health Awareness Programs, Health Screenings, Record Keeping, Emergency Planning, Health Risk Appraisals, and Management Reports. In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that employee health services ranked ***fifth*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). Comments included:

- *Establishing an on-site facility to allow employees to lie down when they are ill and to train several employees to handle first aid (i.e. CPR) [would be helpful].*
- *If there is no place on-site, perhaps [we] could arrange to use nearby HHS health unit (would add time away to get over to the health unit, so it would need to be close by).*

Table 2 on the following page describes recent ITC employee utilization of the HUD Health Unit.

[5] PL 95-437 defines part-time career employment as "part-time employment of 16 to 32 hours a week under a schedule consisting of an equal or varied number of hours per day." Part-time employment includes both traditional part-time employment where one person works less than full time in a position and job-sharing or similar arrangements where more than one person combine to work up to a total of 40 hours per week in one position.

Table 2: ITC Health Service Program

			Number Of Visits				
	COST	**No. of Employees Covered under Service**	No. of Flu Shots	Blood Pressure	No. of Physicals	Others	**Total Visits**
FY 1999	$31,832.00	375	115	138	26	297	550
FY 2000	$34,347.50	385	132	95	N/A*	157	384

* ITC did not provide funds for physicals in FY 2000.

Prior to January 2002, ITC paid a fixed annual amount for health services based on a per capita charge for all covered employees. During our inspection, the OIG alerted the Commission that FOH also allows fee for service billing paid on a quarterly basis. Table 3 below indicates what ITC employee health services would have cost in FY 2000 on a fee for service basis. As shown, the total fee for service cost would have been $12,967.00--$21,380.50 less than the fixed amount paid for health services in FY 2000.

Table 3: Estimated FY 2000 ITC Health Service Cost based on Fee for Service

Service	ITC Employee Visits in FY 2000	Walk-In Fee For Service (Per Person)	Total Cost For Service
Allergy Injection	21	$ 46	$ 966
Assessment and Evaluation	29	$ 46	$ 1,334
Audiometry	1	$ 34	$ 34
Bed rest	2	$ 46	$ 92
Blood Pressure Measurement	95	$ 46	$ 4,370
Cardiac Risk Profile	2	$ 22	$ 44
Consultation with Recipient	29	$ 46	$ 1,334
Health Risk Appraisal	2	$ 46	$ 92
Influenza Virus Vaccination	132	$ 12	$ 1,584
Medication	3	$ 46	$ 138
Pneumococal Vaccination	1	$ 14	$ 14
Outside Provider	17	$ 46	$ 782
Self Directed Care Support	26	$ 46	$ 1,196
Specific client concerns	5	$ 46	$ 230
Tetanus Vaccination	1	$ 11	$ 11
Tonometry	1	$ 10	$ 10
Treatment	5	$ 46	$ 230
Tuberculosis Skin Test	2	$ 23	$ 46
Exercise Education	5	$ 46*	$ 230
Nutrition Education	5	$ 46*	$ 230
TOTAL	**384**		**$ 12,967**

*Labor cost could vary depending on the number of hours the nurse is scheduled for performing the service. Hourly rate for one nurse is $46.

On January 14, 2002, ITC responded to our inspection by entering into a fee-for-service agreement between HHS and ITC for use of the Health Unit located at HUD for the period October 1, 2001 through September 30, 2002.

C. Family-Friendly Leave Programs

Federal employees now have more flexibility in taking leave to deal with personal and family problems, and the Commission has implemented every family-friendly leave program, with the exception of the agency Voluntary Leave Bank program.[6] OPM regulations implementing the presidential memorandum of May 24, 1999, allow employees to take up to 12 weeks of ***sick leave*** to care for a seriously ill family member. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), allows employees to take up to 12 administrative workweeks of ***unpaid leave*** during any 12-month period to take care of a newborn child or a seriously ill family member (including themselves). Additionally, the Federal Employees Family-Friendly Leave Act of 1994 allows employees to use up to 104 hours of ***accrued sick leave*** in a year to care for an ill family member or to make arrangements for a family member's death or to attend the family member's funeral.

Leave-related programs and benefits broaden employees' options to meet family responsibilities. Allowing an employee to use up to 12 weeks of ***sick leave*** precludes the need for many employees to use extended periods of ***leave without pay***, adversely affecting their pay and benefits. In addition, the family-friendly leave programs enable employees to better deal with the financial and personal strain caused by a family member's medical needs.

The Federal Employees Leave Sharing Amendments Act of October 1993, which made permanent the Leave Sharing Act of 1988, directed OPM to establish programs for transfer of unused ***annual leave***[7] from one or more federal employees to another employee experiencing a medical or personal emergency. Such transfers could be made either directly or through a Voluntary Leave Bank program. Survey respondents indicated that the leave transfer program ranked ***sixth*** (See Table 5 on Page 19). Comments included:

- *I only know of donating leave in extreme circumstances. Seems like donating sick leave to sick people would be more helpful than restricting this to donating annual leave only.*
- *Transfer sick leave, not just annual leave to sick employees.*

In its implementing regulations OPM directed agencies to administer a direct employee-to-employee leave transfer program, and the Commission has done so. Under this program, an employee may donate ***annual leave*** directly to another federal employee who has a personal or family medical emergency and who has exhausted his or her available paid leave.

OPM's implementing regulations also provided for the Voluntary Leave Bank program, which agencies could participate in at their option. In answering our survey of interest in family-

[6] The Commission's implementation is described in USITC Directive 4400.1, subject: Attendance and Leave.
[7] The Act did not authorize the transfer of ***sick leave***.

friendly programs, respondents indicated that the Voluntary Leave Bank program ranked ***twelfth***—considerably less interest than in the leave transfer program (See Table 5 on Page 19). Comments included:

- *My husband's agency has [a Leave Bank], and he is very pleased with the way it works.*
- *My concern for establishment of a leave bank, the use of which would probably be available for the asking, is that employees with a history of leave abuse would be able to tap the source. Under the leave transfer program, those of us who donate have control over how much we donate and to whom the donation is given.*
- *The leave bank is not available at this agency; it would be good to have, especially when employees have a lot of use or lose. Instead of losing it or restoring it, their leave will go to [the] leave bank.*

Under this program, an employee must be a member of his or her agency's Voluntary Leave Bank (i.e., must have deposited some leave in the bank), to be eligible to withdraw annual leave from the leave bank. To be eligible, the employee must have experienced a personal or family medical emergency and have exhausted his or her available paid leave. In any leave year, an employee member may donate not more than one-half of the amount of ***annual leave*** he or she would accrue during the leave year. For employees with "use or lose" annual leave, the employee member may donate the lesser of one-half of the annual leave he or she would accrue in a leave year or the number of hours remaining in the leave year for which the employee is scheduled to work and receive pay.

In light of the Commission's participation in the direct employee-to-employee leave program, there may be little demand[8] for the agency Voluntary Leave Bank program. Also, the Commission's Director of Personnel said that a leave bank program would impose too large an administrative burden on the Commission.

D. Telecommuting

In accordance with Congressional and OPM guidance, the Commission implemented a Telecommuting Program by Administrative Order 01-09, dated May 19, 2001. In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that telecommuting ranked ***ninth*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). Employee comments to the OIG survey included:

- *Clarify rules regarding calls to home.*
- *It would be even better if telecommuting were a regular option and not just for 4-day increments.*
- *[I would like] the ability to earn credit for work done at home on nights or weekends so that it is not necessary to travel into the office or stay late at the office . . .*

[8] The Voluntary Leave Bank was not in the top ten family-friendly programs of interest to ITC employees who responded to the OIG survey.

- *The telecommuting program has enormous potential. But it also presents a very real possibility for abuse.*
- *The telecommuting program needs (i.e., continual and not just for specific projects) to be a real program and not what we have currently.*
- *Make [telecommuting] easier to do.*
- *I would prefer a better telecommuting program—one that would permit telecommuting on a regular, scheduled weekly basis.*
- *Have [my Director] take telecommuting seriously.*
- *Telecommuting is not very important to me personally, but I believe that it, along with credit hours and the like, is a significant option that should be available to professional staff in particular. Our physical plant is such that many staff members must share an office even though they often need quiet and solitude for writing and thinking. Thus, the opportunity to work at home or to get credit for work completed away from the office is important for purposes of morale and motivation.*

The Commission's project-based program requires employees to submit telecommuting requests for specific projects of specific duration. During the first month of operation, 12 employees executed telecommuting "contracts" and 7 employees had actually begun telecommuting.

Executive agencies are required to establish policies on telecommuting in accordance with Section 359 of Public Law 106-346. Section 359 provides that:

> Each executive agency shall establish a policy under which eligible employees of the agency may participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance. Not later than 6 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Office of Personnel Management shall provide that the requirements of this section are applied to 25 percent of the federal workforce, and to an additional 25 percent of the federal workforce each year thereafter.

OPM states that each implementing agency must establish eligibility criteria tailored to agency characteristics and allow eligible employees to participate in the program. Because OPM recognizes that not all positions are suitable for telecommuting, each agency is to establish its own requirements regarding the positions or employee characteristics best suited for the program.

Telecommuting can provide employees with more personal time, reduced stress and lower transportation costs. For example, Washington-area federal employees typically can save two hours per day by telecommuting. Not only can these hours be used for personal and family responsibilities but reduced commuter traffic also benefits the environment through reduced automobile emissions and lower energy consumption.

Fewer workday interruptions can lead to greater productivity, and improved job satisfaction can reduce employee turnover—decreasing expenses related to recruiting and training new employees. Also, telecommuting can provide opportunities to reduce facility costs. For every average office space that it feasibly can eliminate, the Commission could save $4,800 in lease cost per year. Finally, telecommuting promotes the dispersal of employees and thus can be an important part of any strategy for our mission to survive acts of terrorism or other disasters.

E. Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The Commission provides EAP through FOH. This is a comprehensive program that helps employees resolve personal problems that may adversely impact their work performance, conduct, health and well-being. EAP services offered include:

- Assessment, Counseling and Referral Services
- Training and Education
- Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)
- Employee Risk Management (supervisor and union consultation)
- "Continuous Quality Improvement" Reviews
- Management Reports (utilization and trend analyses)
- Program Promotion
- Organizational Development
- Depression/Alcohol Screening

Elder Care and Childcare Referral Services are offered to Commission employees through EAP. Financial and Legal Counseling are two new services that have recently been added to the Commission's EAP. The Commission's EAP counseling services are offered at the Department of Transportation building. In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that EAP ranked ***tenth*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19).

Table 4 below indicates the total cost of EAP services provided to ITC employees in FY 1999 and FY 2000. Also shown is the number of visits by ITC employees to EAP counselors.

Table 4: ITC Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

			Number Of Visits			
	COST	**No. Of Employees Covered under Service**	Mental Health	Family/ Marital	Others	**Total Visits**
FY 1999	$9,281.25	375	4	3	4	11
FY 2000	$9,528.75	385	1	2	1	4

F. Student Loan Repayments

Although the Commission does not offer a student loan repayment benefit, student loan repayments can be useful in retaining employees in certain high-turnover positions, such as entry-level attorneys who might have large student loan debts from attending Law School. In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that student loan repayments ranked ***eleventh*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). In 1990, Congress authorized federal agencies to assist their employees in repayment of student loans. However, the OPM regulation implementing this provision did not take effect until April 12, 2001 (5 CFR part 537).

Intended to help agencies retain difficult-to-recruit-or-retain job series, this program provides for an agency to make loan payments of $6,000 per year per employee, with the total amount per employee limited to $40,000. The participating employee must commit to remain with the agency for at least 3 years or else must return all payments to the agency.

G. Childcare

The Commission has not implemented a childcare subsidy program.[9] In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that a childcare subsidy program ranked ***low (sixteenth)*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). Employee comments to the OIG survey included:

- *All parents, regardless of income, would certainly be interested in assistance with childcare expenses. However, given the fact that we have no permanent employees below the GS-7 level, I doubt if any would qualify under the "low income" criteria.*
- *On-site childcare would be very helpful—especially for emergency or out-of-ordinary situations, such as extremely long hearing days.*
- *When I was initially looking [for childcare], I effectively could not take advantage of any federal facilities downtown because [the] agency did not have its own on-site facility . . . was also not a co-sponsor of any facility; [therefore,] I was too far down the wait lists, even as a federal employee of a non-sponsor agency.*
- *I would have thought HUD's daycare would have been close enough. But perhaps they are full . . .? If HUD is not available to ITC employees, then I would say "extremely important;" if HUD daycare is available, then I would think "not very important."*
- *On-site childcare would be great if it allowed for drop-in care.*
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[9] The new childcare legislation became effective September 29, 1999 and remained effective for one year. However, it subsequently was extended until September 30, 2001. On November 12, 2001, President Bush signed the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act (Public Law 107-67) including permanent legislation authorizing use of appropriated funds by executive agencies to provide childcare services for federal civilian employees.

- *On-site daycare would be wonderful, as would daycare assistance (not just low-income families). Daycare is extremely expensive, and employees may find it more economical to quit after more than one child (even if they would prefer to work).*

In 1999, Congress enacted legislation (PL 106-548, Section 643) permitting agencies to use appropriated funds to help lower-income employees cover the costs of childcare in licensed childcare centers. The Commission's Director of Personnel said that the Commission's part sponsorship of a childcare facility at the Department of Transportation building was eventually dropped for lack of interest. The Director of Personnel further stated that he knew of no childcare needs by current employees.

According to the National Treasury Employees Union, childcare is a top household expense for working families with children between ages three and five. In some areas, childcare costs can amount to as much as half of a family's gross annual income. While some federal buildings feature on-site childcare centers, possibly they are not affordable for lower income workers.

The nearest federally sponsored childcare facility,[10] located in the HUD building, charges $177 per week, or $9,204 per year, for a 2-year old child.

Participating agencies[11] have varying income eligibility thresholds -- for example, ranging up to $84,000 for the Central Intelligence Agency and $75,000 for the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. The agencies also have varying methods of determining benefits, including fixed payments, percentage of childcare expense, and percentage of adjusted gross income.

Program advantages can be seen in the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) program. FDA limited subsidies to $4,000 per family and set an eligibility level of $45,000 in total family income, with lower–income families receiving a higher percentage subsidy of their childcare costs. FDA's labor-management council had recommended the program based on an analysis showing that a $200,000 childcare subsidy program for FDA employees could yield savings -- principally from reduced recruitment and training costs -- for FDA of up to $526,000. The analysis also pointed out other non-quantified benefits, including retention of vital knowledge, skills and experience, reductions in absenteeism rates related to childcare problems, and improved morale and productivity.

[10]The new childcare legislation does not require the use of federally sponsored facilities. Families who are eligible for assistance could use a licensed facility closer to their homes, if less expensive or more convenient.

[11]Two of the larger agencies that have established programs are the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Internal Revenue Service. Two of the smaller agencies with such programs are the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

H. Other Family-Friendly Programs

Other family-friendly programs available for implementation by federal agencies include:

1. Transportation Subsidies – The Commission has implemented this provision by Administrative Order 01-03, "Establishment of a Transportation Fringe Benefit Program." The Commission provides employees with transit passes for up to $100 per month of mass transit-related expenses. In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that transportation subsidies ranked ***second*** only to flexible work schedules in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). Executive Order 13150 directed federal agencies to implement a transportation fringe benefit program, intended to reduce federal employees' contribution to traffic congestion and expand their commuting alternatives. One provision of the Order directed federal agencies in the National Capital Region to implement a "transit pass" program to compensate employees for their mass transit commuting costs up to the maximum allowed by law.

2. Educational Assistance – The Commission has implemented educational assistance in Directive 4204, Career Development. In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that educational assistance ranked ***third*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). One employee commented to the OIG survey:

- *Education Assistance is too passive. Why doesn't anybody offer more action career development courses—guidance at least for those interested? Career development must be addressed to retain motivated, ambitious and young personnel!*

Section 4109 of Title 5 of the U.S. Code allows agency heads to authorize payment of all or part of the employee's regular pay during the time that the employee undergoes approved training. The agency head may authorize payment or reimbursement to the employee for expenses of approved training, including tuition, travel and per diem expenses. Under Directive 4204, an ITC office director initially can approve all training for his/her employees as indicated in the training plan and budget for that office. Travel and per diem connected with training come from the office's travel budget.

3. Adoption Assistance - The Commission has implemented adoption assistance in Directive 4400.1, Attendance and Leave. In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that adoption assistance ranked ***thirteenth*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). One employee responded to the OIG survey:

- *I fully support an adoption assistance program. Options available to this parental situation should not be treated differently than that of natural-birth parenting.*

Two laws that assist the adoption process for federal employees are 5 USC 6307 (Sick Leave for Adoption) and FMLA. The Sick Leave for Adoption provision of Title 5 allows federal employees to use sick leave for absences relating to adopting a child. FMLA allows an eligible federal employee to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave for placement of a child with the employee for adoption or foster care.

4. Nursing Mothers Program – In response to this inspection, the Commission established an On-Site Nursing Mothers program. Prior to its establishment, survey respondents ranked the program ***low (eighteenth)*** in their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). Comments included:

- *Right now it would be very difficult to be a nursing mom in this agency. Most employees share offices and would find it awkward to do so in their office. Also, bathrooms do not have private areas equipped with the necessary outlets for pumps. A solution might be the locker rooms which have somewhat less traffic, but that might still impose on those merely wanting to use the locker rooms for pre-or-post exercise reasons.*
- *If there is no place on-site, perhaps we could arrange to use nearby HHS health unit.*
- *This is essential!! To have to use a bathroom or multi-person office is unacceptable. A clean, comfortable, private facility is a necessity.*
- *Our space problem prohibits serious consideration of this option other than on an as-needed basis, which we can accommodate by agreement with individuals who have private offices and are willing to make them available as necessary.*

A presidential memorandum of May 1999 provided for agency heads to promote and establish on-site nursing mothers' programs. Mothers who continue breast-feeding after returning to work must pump during the workday to produce sufficient milk. OPM guidance suggests that establishing a pumping station need not be expensive since the basic requirement is a room with an outlet, refrigerator and chair.

Effective February 20, 2002, Room 405-C now has a keyed lock, an operating refrigerator and will be made available as-needed for the Nursing Mothers Program. Procedures for requesting this accommodation will be included in a revised Equal Employment Opportunity directive.

5. Work Site Support Groups – The Commission has not yet established a parent or elder care support group. In answering our survey about family-friendly programs, respondents indicated that work site support groups ranked ***last (twentieth)*** in

their areas of interest (See Table 5 on Page 19). The same presidential memorandum of May 1999 also provided for agency heads to promote and establish parent and elder care support groups. Inexpensive and relatively simple to implement, work-site support groups can be an effective and useful way to help employees to balance work and family care demands.

I. Other Employee Comments

Employees provided a number of comments not directly related to the employee survey questions. One area that generated many comments was the ***casual dress policy***; comments included:

- *[We should have] casual dress all of the time. I think this is a morale booster and definitely makes my life seem easier.*
- *A year-round "corporate casual" dress code would boost morale. The code should continue to call for "business attire" for meetings with practice from outside the Commission and at hearings. Jeans are appropriate only on Fridays and days with rain, snow, or cold.*
- *Accept the fact that casual dress is appropriate year-round attire and that attempts to enforce a dress code are counter-productive.*
- *[Let's have] year-round corporate casual.*
- *Extend casual dress all year long.*
- *Make "casual dress" an all-year-round option—but in exchange for doing so, limit wearing of jeans to Fridays and inclement weather days.*
- *Maintain business casual policy throughout the year (possibly limiting jeans to Fridays)*
- *Make "dressy casual" [a] year-round option (keep suit available for meetings outside or hearings inside). No jeans, except "casual Friday."*

A number of employees commented about their desire for ***fitness or wellness facilities***:

- *A walking 1-hour program at least 3 days per week should be organized and monitored by a fitness expert.*
- *Give all employees a raise (OK—I tried). Assign someone (in Administration perhaps) to research gyms at DOT and Gold's and post items of health or fitness interest on our Intranet and update it monthly.*
- *[I would like a] subsidy for outside fitness facilities (YMCA, Gold's Gym, etc.).*
- *[Let's have an] exercise facility in the building—a place where one can go in the building.*

Other employees offered comments about ***office visits by our loved ones***:

- *[Let's have] agency-sponsored events (e.g., picnic) where families are invited.*

- *Establish a policy on children coming to work.*
- *This may not be family-friendly, but when children come to work with their parents, parents should not allow them to play with office equipment, especially typewriters and PC's; parents should keep children in their work area with them.*
- *I'd like the Agency to allow employees to bring their pet to work on a designated bring your pet to work day.*

Finally, there were ***overall comments*** that summed up employees' feelings about working for the Commission, including:

- *When the head of an office has a positive attitude towards employee family issues (i.e., tries to be helpful, supportive, etc. without being intrusive . . .) then the supervisors and their employees follow that leadership. The ITC, in my opinion, has this leadership in the office where I work. I think the head of the agency (Commission & Chairman) set a positive tone, too.*
- *Overall, I am quite satisfied with the workplace policies of the ITC.*
- *Whether or not any of these programs, if and as implemented by ITC, might be considered "family-friendly" as programs, any perception of ITC as a "family-friendly" employer is vitiated by . . . programs have been implemented at the minimal level the law requires . . .*
- *The ITC is a family-friendly workplace in spite of the limitations of the building we occupy which do not allow the luxury of space available to other agencies that accommodate onsite options that we cannot offer . . .*

J. Results of Employee Survey

During the week ending August 31, 2001, we conducted a survey of Commission employees to determine their level of interest in family-friendly programs. The survey instrument we used is shown in Appendix I. We disseminated the survey instrument to all 365 Commission employees and received 160 responses, which is about a 44% response rate.

In the first section of the survey, we asked employees whether they agreed with the statement "The Commission is a family-friendly place to work." The possible response choices, the survey results and the assigned weighting of response choices were as follows:

Response	Survey Results	Assigned Weighting
Strongly Disagree	7	0
Disagree	10	1
Agree	89	2
Strongly Agree	34	3
No Opinion	20	N/A
Total	160	

The average weighted response to the survey was 2.07, which indicates general agreement that the Commission is a family-friendly place to work.

The next section of the survey asked employees to rate the relative importance of 20 family-friendly programs. The response choices for this section and their assigned weighting were as follows:

Response Choice	Assigned Weighting
Not at all Important	0
Not Very Important	1
Somewhat Important	2
Extremely Important	3
No Opinion	N/A

The results of this section of the survey are shown in Table 5 on the following page. This Table shows the ordered ranking of family-friendly programs according to the average weighted survey response. As shown, Commission employees rated Flexible Work Schedules as the most

important program followed by Transportation Subsidy and Educational Assistance. Telecommuting ranked 9th in importance. The lowest ranked program was Support Groups followed closely by Job-Sharing and Nursing Mothers Program. Seven programs fell below the "somewhat important" level in the survey. However, all family-friendly programs ranked above the "not very important" level. The highest ranked program not currently offered by the Commission was Fitness Program which was ranked seventh.

Table 5 – Survey Ranking of Family-Friendly Programs

Rank	Program	Average Weighted Response
1	Flexible Work Schedules	2.82
2	Transportation Subsidy	2.71
3	Educational Assistance	2.65
4	Compressed Work Schedules	2.42
5	Employee Health Service	2.4
6	Leave Transfer	2.37
7	Fitness Program	2.33
8	Wellness Program	2.27
9	Telecommuting	2.24
10	Employee Assistance	2.18
11	Student Loan Repayment	2.18
12	Leave Bank	2.15
13	Adoption Assistance	1.99
14	Part-Time Employment	1.99
15	Work-Life Seminars	1.95
16	Childcare Subsidy	1.87
17	On-Site Childcare	1.81
18	Nursing Mothers Program	1.78
19	Job Sharing	1.72
20	Support Groups	1.69

The last section of the survey was a comments section allowing employees to submit their own suggestions for making the Commission a more family-friendly workplace.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The Commission has put in place most family-friendly policies and programs, particularly with regard to family leave, alternative work schedules, employee health and telecommuting. Although all programs of greatest interest to employees are available, the few remaining programs could possibly benefit Commission employees. At present, employees have less interest in programs such as childcare subsidies and student loan repayments, and the Commission has not fully considered employee needs for them.

In light of these findings, the Commission should consider taking the following actions:

1. Conduct periodic, comprehensive surveys of its employees to determine their needs and preferences for the total spectrum of family-friendly programs listed in Table 1.

2. Analyze the total benefits of family-friendly programs to both the Commission and its employees.

3. Use the results of these surveys and benefits analyses to determine whether to institute new family-friendly programs or curtail or terminate existing programs that may not meet the needs of its employees.

4. Establish a policy for on-site support groups.

5. Initiate a program for assisting employees in hard-to-retain series with student loan repayments in exchange for a commitment to a fixed period of service.

6. Consider the need, if any, for a childcare subsidy program.

APPENDIX I – Survey Instrument

ITC Family-Friendly Workplace Survey

Instructions: Please check one box for each item. After completing the survey form, please return to: OIG, Room 515.

1. The Commission is a family-friendly place to work. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ No Opinion

Please rate the following potential benefits in terms of their importance in improving the Commission's work/family environment from your own personal perspective.

2. **Telecommuting** (Allows an employee to work from home or an alternate work site)

☐ Not at all Important ☐ Not very Important ☐ Somewhat Important ☐ Extremely Important ☐ No Opinion

3. **Leave Transfer** (Allows employees to transfer annual leave to other employees who have exhausted their leave dealing with a medical emergency)

☐ Not at all Important ☐ Not very Important ☐ Somewhat Important ☐ Extremely Important ☐ No Opinion

4. **Leave Bank** (Allows members to contribute annual leave to a "bank" where it is available for use by themselves or other members who have exhausted their leave dealing with a medical emergency)

☐ Not at all Important ☐ Not very Important ☐ Somewhat Important ☐ Extremely Important ☐ No Opinion

5. **Flexible Work Schedule** (Allows an employee to determine his or her own work schedule within limits set by the agency)

☐ Not at all Important ☐ Not very Important ☐ Somewhat Important ☐ Extremely Important ☐ No Opinion

APPENDIX I – Survey Instrument (Continued)

6. **Compressed Work Schedule** (Allows an employee to complete an 80-hour biweekly work requirement in less than 10 days)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

7. **Job Sharing** (Allows more than one employee to work up to a total of 40 hours per week in one position)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

8. **Part-time Employment** (Allows an employee to work between 16 and 32 hours per week)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

9. **On-site Childcare** (Provides space for on-site childcare – no agency-subsidized tuition)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

10. **Childcare Subsidy** (Provides a subsidy to lower income families for employee childcare expenses at any licensed childcare facility)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

11. **Student Loan Repayments to Recruit or Retain Highly Qualified Employees in Eligible Series** (Allows an employee to receive up to $6,000 per year for student loan repayment in exchange for a 3-year service commitment)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

12. **Employee Health Service** (Provides on-site or nearby health services such as First Aid, flu shots and health screening)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

APPENDIX I – Survey Instrument (Continued)

13. **Employee Assistance Program** (Assists employees in dealing with personal problems such as substance abuse, elder care or finances)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

14. **Transportation Subsidy** (Provides a cash subsidy for employee commuting and parking expenses)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

15. **Work Site Support Groups** (Establishes on-site support groups for employees experiencing common family-related problems such as parenting or elder care)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

16. **Nursing Mothers Program** (Provides on-site facility to assist mothers who are breast-feeding their children)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

17. **Adoption Assistance** (Allows employees to take leave for adoption or foster care placement purposes)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

18. **Educational Assistance** (Provides payment for tuition and other expenses of work related training)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

19. **Fitness Program** (provides employees with fitness facilities and supervised fitness training)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

APPENDIX I – Survey Instrument (Continued)

20. **Wellness Program** (Provides employees with information and counseling on health maintenance)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

21. **Work-Life Seminars** (Provides employees with information and advice on balancing the demands of their work and personal lives)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not at all Important	Not very Important	Somewhat Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion

22. What other suggestions do you have for making the Commission a more family-friendly work place?