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**AFGE Wins Arbitration Overturning Restrictive, Faulty SSA Employee Leave Guideline
*Arbitrator Finds Agency Violated Employee Rights, Contract***

(WASHINGTON) – The American Federation of Government Employees recently won a Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) decision to overturn an agency guideline that severely limited when SSA Teleservice representatives would be allowed to be on leave on any given day. Teleservice representatives answer SSA’s nationwide toll-free number.

“The agency capriciously administered these new guidelines and in doing so, created havoc in the workplace and severely impacted the employees and their families,” stated Charles Estudillo, first vice president of AFGE Council 220, who represented AFGE in the arbitration.

The guideline in question limited leave approvals to “up to 10%” on peak call days at the teleservice center and “up to 15%” on no-peak call days. Discretion was given to leave-approving officials to deny leave requests far below the 10-15% based on workload interference, even though the 800# system is a fully integrated national system and no single installation could claim a legitimate operational need to deny leave on the ground of undue interference with the work.

Due to a massive failure in communication the guidelines to leave-approving officials, there was much confusion among both the implementing management officials and employees regarding what the guidelines were. In the confusion, management applied the guidelines to categories of leave that were not intended to be addressed such as sick leave, Family Friendly leave, same day leave, and emergency leave.

“We found that some facilities managers were demanding that employees bring in obituaries for bereavement leave, notes for tire repairs or broken water heaters, notes from schools and policemen, notes from doctors being required, denying two hours of leave for an employee to take her son to his first day of school, requiring a note from the doctor of an employee’s mother, and denying a sick leave request for a medical appointment made 3 months in advance because ‘no more people could be on leave.’ This created a devastating effect for all employees,” stated Estudillo.

An independent arbitrator, as well as the FLRA, agreed with the union. In his ruling, the arbitrator found that the agency violated the parties’ agreement by implementing a policy that restricted when certain employees could use annual leave. “The guideline was an unreasonable personnel policy that resulted in direct harm to affected employees. We are pleased that this unreasonable management action has been overturned and that the agency must honor the appropriate arrangements for employees that were agreed to in our contract,” concluded Estudillo.

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The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest federal employee union, representing 600,000 workers in the federal government and the government of the District of Columbia.