

I am contacting you as my member of Congress to urge your support for a Foreign Service early retirement option, especially in the event of a reduction in force (RIF). Right now, there is no early retirement authority for the Foreign Service. With RIF notices already provided to USAID employees and separation dates approaching, timely congressional authorization of an early retirement option is essential to give those facing involuntary retirement a compassionate transition out of the Foreign Service.

In the event of a RIF, Foreign Service members in grades FS-01 and above qualify for an immediate lifetime annuity and a continuation of their Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) insurance coverage. However, FS-02s and below receive only severance pay, unless they meet the age and service requirements for a voluntary annuity (most commonly, at age 50 with 20 years of service). Without a Foreign Service early retirement authority in place, those just shy of being eligible for a voluntary annuity would lose their health benefits and would only be able to receive a deferred annuity.

Current early retirement options applicable to the Civil Service reduce the age threshold for an immediate annuity from 57 to 50 years of age. Given the Foreign Service is already eligible for an immediate annuity at age 50, current options using this age threshold are not applicable to the Foreign Service. In the current era of government workforce reduction, there have been proposals to reduce the service threshold from 20 years to 15 years for early retirement options as well.

While other thresholds for a Foreign Service early retirement could be used, there is value in using the same reduction in age threshold and the same total years in service threshold as options already in place or being considered for other federal employees. For example, early retirement offered to those with at least 15 years of service and at least 43 years of age has the potential to help hundreds of Foreign Service members.

I hope you will work with your colleagues to authorize a Foreign Service early retirement option as soon as possible and consider all legislative vehicle options.