

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 1, 2022

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a review to examine whether the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are providing adequate mental health services and resources to department and agency personnel who live and work outside of the United States.

The State Department currently employs approximately 77,000 individuals, including about 13,600 members of the Foreign Service and 11,000 members of the Civil Service. Almost 9,000 of these officials carry out the Department's mission from more than 270 diplomatic posts around the world.¹ In addition, USAID currently employs more than 10,000 individuals, including more 6,400 who serve in roles abroad.²

While all State Department and USAID personnel may at times require access to mental health services, diplomatic and development personnel serving abroad often live and work in exceptionally challenging environments—including countries experiencing instability, terrorism, and conflict—that can place significant strain on their mental health.³

¹ Department of State, *Global Talent Management Fact Sheet* (Sept. 30, 2021) (online at www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GTM_Factsheet_0921.pdf).

² U.S. Agency for International Development, *Fiscal Year 2021 Agency Financial Report* (Nov. 2021) (online at www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USAID_FY2021_AFR_508.pdf).

³ See e.g., Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Review of Support for Employees Who Are Serving or Have Served in High Stress, High Threat, Unaccompanied Posts* (July 2010) (online at www.stateoig.gov/system/files/145424.pdf); Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, *Hearing on Working in a War Zone: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Civilians Returning from Iraq*, 110th Cong. (June 19, 2007) (online at www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-110hhrg36206/pdf/CHRG-110hhrg36206.pdf); American Foreign Service Association, *MED/MHS Checkup: Foreign Service Members Weigh In* (Feb. 2016) (online at <https://afsa.org/medmhs-checkup-foreign-service-members-weigh>); *Foreign Service in Danger Zones Leads to High Rates of PTSD, Study Says*, Fox News (Aug. 14, 2007) (online at www.foxnews.com/story/foreign-service-in-danger-zones-leads-to-high-rates-of-ptsd-study-says).

State Department and USAID personnel serving overseas may experience additional stressors connected to their service, such as long separations from their families or burdensome constraints on their social lives.⁴

We are concerned that State Department and USAID employees experiencing mental health challenges may not be able to access mental health care services while serving abroad, or may refrain from seeking assistance if they are worried that disclosing personal mental health information will adversely affect their diplomatic careers or ability to hold a security clearance.⁵

It is critical that the State Department and USAID recognize and take steps to address the mental health challenges of their personnel serving abroad. To that end, we request that GAO initiate a review that evaluates the following:

1. What policies, programs, and initiatives do the State Department and USAID have in place to identify, detect, and monitor mental health risks and conditions among Civil and Foreign Service employees serving abroad?
2. To what extent do the State Department and USAID take clinical and non-clinical mental health conditions, either disclosed by an employee or identified by a mental health care provider, into consideration when assigning them to work at an overseas post?
3. What stress management and mental health services do the State Department and USAID provide to employees serving at overseas posts?
4. What challenges or obstacles to accessing mental health resources and services have been identified by State Department and USAID employees serving at overseas posts?

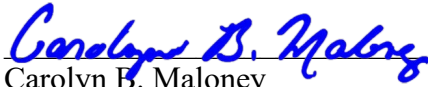
Please include recommendations, as appropriate, for agency or congressional action in your evaluation.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee on Oversight and Reform staff at (202) 225-5051 or Committee on Foreign Affairs staff at (202) 225-5021.

⁴ See e.g., United States Agency for International Development, *Assessment Report: Stress and Resilience Issues Affecting USAID Personnel in High Operational Stress Environments* (Sept. 2015) (online at www.greenleafintegrative.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2015-Greenleaf-USAID-Report-and-Executive-Summary-Report.pdf).

⁵ American Foreign Service Association, *MED/MHS Checkup: Foreign Service Members Weigh In* (Feb. 2016) (online at <https://afsa.org/medmhs-checkup-foreign-service-members-weigh>).

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Gregory Meeks
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs



Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Michael McCaul, Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs

The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security