

Bruce Hamilton, Chairman
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**DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES
SAFETY BOARD**

Washington, DC 20004-2901



April 27, 2020

Dr. Brett Baker
Assistant Inspector General for Audits
Mailstop OWF E13
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20852

Dear Dr. Baker:

On May 29, 2018, the IG issued report, DNFSB 18-A-05, Audit of DNFSB's Implementation of Its Governing Legislation. Among its findings and recommendations were concerns regarding the collegiality of the Board Members and in particular, concerns on the impact of employee morale. Specifically, Recommendation 2 in the report states: Develop and implement a plan of action to address the issues of (1) low employee morale and (2) Board collegiality as documented in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), LMI report, and Towers Watson Report.

As an Agency, on November 12, 2019, we responded to the Recommendation with a description of actions taken to date, including work to develop a strategic plan, a path forward for employee engagement with a focus on internal communications and change management, and a description of the efforts of the Board and senior leadership to address collegiality concerns through a series of workshops with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. In reply, the OIG stated that the Recommendation will be closed when the Strategic Plan is implemented and satisfactorily addresses issues of low morale and Board collegiality.

We are pleased to inform you that the Strategic Plan has been completed and informs our current work. The Board is reviewing all of its policy statements and will be reissuing them. As part of our strategic vision, the Board has obtained statutory authority to hire an Executive Director of Operations (EDO), similar to the position at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. We believe that that once the position is filled, the EDO will allow the Board to operate at a more strategic level and leave tactical matters to the professional staff. The lack of this "buffer" has been cited in several of the reports as hindering collegial relations and causing anxiety among staff. More immediate actions taken by the Board involves altering the use of the procedural tool "requests for Board Action" or RFBAs. This tool was designed to allow any Board Member to propose an action for the Board to take or to direct staff to undertake a task. This procedure was cited in many of the evaluations of the Agency as being "weaponized" and as sowing discord in the Agency. Over the past year, the Board Members have refrained from using this tool without consulting all of the other Board Members and it is used primarily as a

means to record a decision of the Board that is already widely accepted by the Board Members. (Note: the Board uses this mechanism versus unanimous consent to memorialize decisions of higher consequence.)

Morale in the Agency has also undergone a gradual transformation since the National Academy of Public Administration's 2018 assessment. Our FY19 personnel attrition rate of 7 percent is much lower than our FY18 rate of 27 percent, with the majority of those departing the Agency doing so to pursue jobs more in line with their professional goals. Additionally, staff members who were on professional growth details returned to the Agency, rather than seeking other employment, which is always a risk.

We also see positive trends in areas of job satisfaction in our 2019 FEVS scores, which shows an increase from the data reflected in the IG's 2018 report. Question 69 of the FEVS measures job satisfaction. While the IG report captured the years 2014-2017 and showed the last percentage of job satisfaction as 53.88 percent and trending down from a high in 2016 of 62.88 percent, our 2018 score for question 69 was 48 percent, while our latest 2019 score was at 59 percent. This year's FEVS is being postponed due to the impacts of COVID-19, and the resulting scores when the surveys are given may be anomalous due to the circumstances. FEVS question 71 was the other score measured by OIG, which queries "overall how satisfied are you with your organization?" In the numbers captured by the IG since 2014, the score peaked in 2016 at 48.35 percent and then dipped to 31.5 percent in 2016. Over the past two years, the score has held at 33 percent, which is unsatisfactory to the Board. We believe that with more collegial Board operations, strong communications with management and staff, an implementation of the Strategic Plan, and a thoughtful transition to organizational change with an EDO, these scores will improve.

One of the struggles in recent years has been a sluggish hiring process, in part due to internal inefficiencies and also to a tight labor market, which has left some parts of the organization understaffed. As a result, we have noticed a dip in FEVS scores related to adequate staff resourcing. The Agency has taken steps to remedy that situation and has been able to hire and process new staff more efficiently and effectively over the past year. Our expectation is that the acquisition of new staff will help alleviate some of staff concerns and thus improve scores, but more importantly, improve the Agency's ability to perform its core mission.

Based on the publishing and implementation of the Board's new strategic plan, which addresses issues of low morale and Board collegiality, recent positive trends in job satisfaction among Board staff, and ongoing efforts to increase employee morale, we believe DNFSB has met the intent of the remaining recommendation from IG report DNFSB 18-A-05 and that the recommendation should be closed.

Yours truly,



Bruce Hamilton
Chairman