

**FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF COMMUNICATIONS@MWCOG.ORG**

From the Washington Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2023/08/30/federal-workforce-council-of-governments.html>

SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:

**Commercial Real Estate**

## **Council of Governments vents frustration over feds' sluggish return to work**



Image: Tom Saunders

Clark Mercer says the federal government can learn something from Greater Washington jurisdictions.

TOM SAUNDERS



By **Tristan Navera** – Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal  
Aug 30, 2023 **Updated** Aug 30, 2023 11:20am EDT

---

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments is weighing in on the federal government's slow return to work, calling for a more robust in-office presence.

On Wednesday, the heads of 23 Greater Washington local government jurisdictions – representing 100,000 employees – **penned a letter** to Shalanda Young, director of the Office of Management and Budget, saying their own experiences bringing local government workers back could serve as a model for the feds.

"I think it has frustrated the localities that the feds have been in the state of limbo for as long as they have," COG Executive Director Clark Mercer told me, referencing the three-plus years of work from home that has lingered since Covid-19 swept the nation in 2020.

Earlier this month, the Biden administration called for federal agencies to **"aggressively execute" return-to-office plans** this fall. Federal agencies have been left to their own devices to **tailor return-to-office plans** since an April order to do so.

---

**Related:** [The Business Journal surveyed the 24 major agencies about their policies. Here's what we found.](#)

---

Mercer, who **took over for Chuck Bean in February**, said local governments have many people-facing jobs and can more easily measure productivity when employees are in the office.

"Being able to work together, troubleshoot problems, take on big ideas, and provide face-to-face service for our residents is achieved while still providing flexibility for our personnel to work from home," the COG letter states.

Mercer said there's another issue for local jurisdictions: "It's put pressures on the localities as they try to recruit as well."

D.C. and many local counties and cities have gradually increased their in-person work over the past two years, he said, and are having trouble competing with the feds for recruitment.

The organization also said having some regularity in the number of people going to the office every day will help localities manage commuting patterns.

"It's helpful to have a discussion, or at a minimum to coordinate what these work-from-home policies would be," Mercer said. "In addition to productivity there's secondary or tertiary issues. We run the MARC and VRE trains, for instance, and if everyone came in on a Wednesday it would be tough to coordinate the rest of the week."

"It is difficult to efficiently operate train systems and WMATA without predictable ridership spread across the work week," the letter notes.