

## **The “E” in DOGE ... What does it really mean?**

Allegedly, the “E” in the Trump administration’s DOGE stands for Efficiency. The Department was tasked to weed out inefficiency in government operations. But the recent closure of five federal Regional Offices belies efficiency in any business sense.

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) employees in the New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Seattle Regional Offices were denied access when they arrived at work – no warning, planning, or explanation. This closure has left the remaining five regional offices - Philadelphia, Atlanta, Dallas, Kansas City, and Denver – to absorb the workload of the other five. Many hoped this was an April Fool’s joke, but it wasn’t.

The closures are part of HHS’ plan to “Make America Healthy Again.” The HHS Regional Offices administer a number of HHS divisions and programs, including child care, TANF, SNAP, child support enforcement, foster care, adoption, LIHEAP, home visiting, programs for persons with disabilities, seniors, military families and health, wellness, and prevention. Regional office staff act as a conduit for federal grants and aid, provide technical assistance and support, and forge relationships between health departments, academic institutions and community-based organizations.

‘Efficiency’ in government can be defined as ‘producing the required outcome with the minimal (or appropriate) amount of resources, time, and cost.’<sup>1</sup> Let’s examine a few possibly critical efficiency factors.

One could argue that good planning and transparency leads to efficiency and more positive outcomes. HHS’ closures were implemented abruptly, without a transparent plan to help all parties understand at a minimum how communication would flow and how massive workloads would be redistributed. HHS has provided no analysis of human or financial inefficiencies, how this closure will address them, or the criteria for the closures; HHS has said it focused on the offices in the highest cost cities. In the Head Start program, neither the central office nor the remaining regional offices were privy to when or how the closures were coming, creating mass confusion.

Little or no communication to the field and left 22 states and five territories without a local point of contact, flying in the face of communication as a critical element of ‘efficiency.’ On April 3<sup>rd</sup> – two days after the closures - a memo from the HHS Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development finally instructed Head Start agencies to use the online grant system and a generic email address for communication. But these systems will have

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<sup>1</sup> [Defining and achieving efficiency in government](#)

to be managed by current staff so one has to wonder what the response time will be like and how this will affect 'efficiency.'

The same HHS memo stated that the restructuring would serve multiple goals without impacting critical services, ultimately saving taxpayers \$1.8 billion per year. With no additional staff in the remaining five offices to manage these programs from some very large and populous regions in addition to their current workloads, it's hard to imagine how this move will not impact services or create 'efficiency,' especially when considered with the closures of the HHS Contracts and Communications offices. How will the outcomes required or mandated by law, regulations and Congress be realized?

Finally, less than 1% of Head Start's annual funding is spent on federal staff including regional offices, according to the National Head Start Association. Unlike the other programs, Head Start is administered federally to locally, saving the administrative costs of a state pass through or block grant. If less than 1% of the annual budget is spent on federal staff, one has to wonder how much 'efficiency' in costs savings this move could really net without the higher cost of delayed or disrupted services.

Although 'efficiency' isn't a partisan concept, it hasn't gone unnoticed that the shuttered Regional Offices were in states not necessarily favorable to the current administration. These closures and the lack of efficiency created by them will most affect the people using the services – people who need them for survival, not profit. One hopes moving forward, this administration will be more able to actually tie its actions to efficiency in a non-punitive manner.