



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# News Release

Office of Public Affairs  
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Nov. 15, 2019

## **VA announces limits on taxpayer-funded union time, tells unions to pay their fair share for office space, equipment**

**WASHINGTON** - The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced today that unions will be required to vacate or pay rent for the use of VA office space and equipment that they previously used for free. Further, VA employees who serve as union representatives are now expected to spend at least 75 percent of their paid time performing VA business or necessary training in most circumstances.

The changes are part of VA's implementation of the following three important Executive Orders:

- [Developing efficient, effective, and cost-reducing approaches to federal sector collective bargaining \(13836\)](#)
- [Ensuring transparency, accountability, and efficiency in taxpayer funded union time use \(13837\)](#)
- [Promoting accountability and streamlining removal procedures consistent with merit systems principles \(13839\)](#)

The Executive Orders generally end the practice of offering free or discounted use of government property to labor organizations.

VA will provide union leaders with rental costs for all union-occupied spaces by Dec. 13, and unions have until Jan. 10, 2020, to notify VA of their intent to either vacate or rent each VA space currently occupied. If there is no notice of intent to rent received, VA will consider the lack of notice an intent to vacate.

Unless a notice of intent to rent is received, unions have until Jan. 31, 2020, to:

- Remove from all VA controlled space any property belonging to the union, its officers, representatives or other affiliates.
- Return any government furnished equipment provided to the union, its officers, representatives or other affiliates for the purpose of conducting non-VA business.

Prohibiting the free or discounted use of government property for union business will either result in new revenue for the government or more office space to benefit Veterans. At the [Salem VA Medical Center](#) alone, [AFGE National VA Council President Alma Lee](#) and other union officials are occupying more than [7,500 square feet of space](#), which they will now need to vacate or rent under the Executive Orders.

The Executive Orders also seek to limit taxpayer-funded union time, redirecting man hours from union business back to direct services and medical care. In FY 2016, VA employees spent [more than a million duty hours](#) on taxpayer-funded union time at a cost of more than \$49 million.

The Executive Orders generally require union representatives and employees to request and receive written approval prior to the use of taxpayer-funded union time. Further, the Executive Orders require all VA employees to spend at least 75 percent of their paid time performing VA business or necessary training, unless otherwise authorized by law (e.g., 5 U.S.C. §§ 7131(a) and (c)), regulation, or an exception in the Executive Order.

Finally, as part of the Executive Orders, VA will not:

- Reimburse employees for expenses incurred performing non-agency business, unless required by law or regulation.
- Approve taxpayer-funded union time for lobbying activities, as conducting lobbying activities while on paid time is prohibited for all Department employees.
- Approve taxpayer-funded union time for preparing or pursuing grievances, including arbitration, on behalf of bargaining unit employees, except where such use is otherwise authorized by law or regulation, or Executive Order.

“Common sense dictates that VA employees’ main focus should be providing Veterans the best possible care, benefits and customer service. At the same time, unions using VA facilities should have to pay their fair share,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “These Executive Orders will help ensure that’s the case.”

###