



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE & FINANCIAL SERVICES  
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SERVING THE PUBLIC AND DELIVERING ESSENTIAL SERVICES TO STATE GOVERNMENT

JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

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COMMISSIONER

December 1, 2020

Senator Ned Claxton  
Representative Roland “Danny” Martin  
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Lynne Caswell  
Office of Policy and Legal Analysis  
13 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0013

RE: Costs and benefits of telework to the State and its employees

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Martin, and Ms. Caswell:

I write today to report on LD 1004, a “Resolve, To Direct the Department of Administrative and Financial Services To Study the Costs and Benefits of Telework to the State and Its Employees,” passed during the first session of the 129<sup>th</sup> Legislature in June 2019.

The Legislature’s goal, at that time, was to garner “more information on the costs and benefits to the State and its employees” as to whether permitting State employees to telework reduces carbon emissions in the State by eliminating or substantially reducing the physical commutes to and from State employees’ usual worksites and/or whether permitting State employees to telework will have benefits and costs for the State and its employees.

In March 2020, just before the pandemic struck, DAFS contracted with the Segal Group to study the State of Maine’s telework potential. Segal Group has worked very closely with a steering committee comprised of members from both DAFS’ team at the Bureau of Human Resources and the Maine Service Employees Association (MSEA), the workers’ union representing the vast majority of State employees, to both design and execute its survey.

In particular, Segal Group’s efforts are intended to: examine ways in which similar employers are adjusting to new technologies, particularly around telecommuting, and recommend parameters and best practices for developing a more mobile, knowledge-based workforce; collect data on evolving best practices for teleworking policies for State employees, including recommendations for how to manage and develop this more mobile workforce;

conduct a survey of comparable employers' practices and policies on teleworking, along with any available data regarding the size and spread of the employer's work force; and to make recommendations as to best practices for encouraging and managing telework.

As a result of COVID-19, quite understandably, the original timeline for this project was revised. As I write this today, steering committee members continue to work with Segal Group to finalize the telecommuting study. We will be certain to share an update on the finished product.

In the meantime, the most resonant findings to date include information on telework among other public employees and/or within other jurisdictions beyond State workers in Maine. Employer study participants included the cities of Augusta, Bangor, Portland, and South Portland; Cumberland County; the states of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Vermont; as well as the Federal government. Included below is an excerpt from Segal Group, which contains some of the telework trends from these other employers:

*"Of the survey respondents, eight of ten permit some or all of their workforces to telecommute. Of those eight, seven allow all job categories to work remotely based on the employees' ability to complete their assigned tasks. The agency that has limitations allows only non-union division manager and department head level employees to work remotely. One agency imposes procedural limitations on the maximum days an employee can telecommute (less than five days) while the remaining empower individual departments to develop and enforce caps based on the jobs performed by their employees. Six respondents have a formal authorization process while seven supply some form of technology for remote workers. Only two, however, provide reimbursement of supplies for employees who work remotely.*

*"Aside from typical performance standards or the achievement of defined objectives, only two respondents monitor productivity through work logs or specially-defined time sheets. A single agency advertises telework as a benefit to employees while only one has positions designated exclusively as telework as well. As can be expected, many agencies are re-evaluating their telework practices as a result of the pandemic, with five of the eight who permit remote work specifically stating that COVID19 has impacted their approach. One respondent who indicated they don't typically allow telecommuting, is currently making exceptions on a case-by-case basis due to certain medical conditions and jobs that presently lend themselves to remote work to minimize the possibility of exposure."*

Beyond the ongoing efforts with Segal Group, as a result of moving a large portion of the State's workforce to ad hoc teleworking at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and managing remote teams since, State government has learned many lessons and gained valuable insight about the future of remote work within State government.

All told, we transitioned 85 percent of State employees in non-24/7, public safety designated positions to working from home as of April 1, 2020. This is an unintended silver lining and will inform both the interpretation of the Segal Group's report and allow us to better optimize workforce engagement and retention efforts should we pursue permanent telework arrangements in the future. As we have previously reported to you, the pandemic forced us to set aside our ingrained objections to telework, overcome our resistance to change and has slingshotted us past merely contemplating telework via LD 1004 to full implementation – including an evaluation of telework's impact on the State and our

employees. Out of necessity and urgency, months' worth of transition was executed over a few short weeks with little disruption to State work and services.

When DAFS' Bureau of Human Resources surveyed State employees at both the six-month mark and the nine-month mark, most State employees reported continued success with and interest in telework. In May 2020, 36 percent of respondents expressed a desire to continue working remotely, while another 38 percent indicated a preference for a combination of office work and remote work. In November 2020, 89 percent of State employee respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with telework, and 86 percent reported that their productivity while teleworking is efficient and effective when compared to working in the office.

Those same internal surveys of State employees captured impressive findings vis-à-vis mileage and gasoline consumption --- with results indicating a considerable reduction in carbon emissions. To be fair, we are still crunching the numbers, though preliminary estimates indicate that, from April through November, State employees saved 17,877 trips per week, drove 1,088,980 fewer miles per week, and were responsible for 233,103 fewer pounds of carbon emissions *every week*. A quick calculation shows that pandemic telecommuting has saved our ozone layer from 1.86 million pounds of emissions since April 1. Again, I will keep you posted as those numbers are finalized. Some amount of telework is sure to be an integral component of meeting Governor Mills' climate objectives.

As the second largest employer in Maine, we are in a position to be a leader in workplace innovation, environmental stewardship, and economic development. DAFS will continue the charge set forth in LD 1004 and we look forward to working with the State and Local Government Committee, the full Legislature, with MSEA and our other union partners, and with our colleagues across State government as we receive final reporting from the Segal Group and continue to analyze the findings of the employee surveys. An ongoing and thoughtful conversation about telework is certain to unfold as we continue to process the unexpected lessons of the pandemic telework experience.

Respectfully submitted,



Kirsten LC Figueroa  
Commissioner

cc: Governor Janet T. Mills  
Senator Troy Jackson, President of the Senate  
Representative Ryan Fecteau, Speaker of the House  
Representative Seth Berry