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Susanne R. Young, Secretary

To: Appointing Authorities, Elected Officials, and State Employees
Cc: FYI: Judicial and Legislative Branches
From: Susanne Young, Secretary of Administration
Date: August 24, 2021
Subject: Telework Option for State Employees - Next Steps

Background:

As September 1st fast approaches, this communication is follow-up to the [May 14, 2021](#) memo to employees regarding telework options for state employees this fall. It is important to remember that we are moving from a pre-vaccine remote work environment necessitated by the state of emergency declared due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The objectives of Stay Home/Stay Safe mandates, which directed all State employees who could telecommute or work from home if able to do so, were to slow the spread of the virus and keep our health care system from being overwhelmed pending successful development and delivery of a vaccine. Vermont led the nation in this response thanks to so many state employees.

Universal Guidance Being Followed:

We are no longer operating under a Governor's emergency order and all restrictions imposed during the state of emergency were lifted on June 14, 2021. As a result, the State as an employer is following universal guidance in state owned and leased buildings, except for 24/7 facilities, such as correctional and mental health facilities and the Vermont Veterans' Home.

Universal guidance is simple and direct:

- If you are vaccinated, you are not required to wear a mask - but do what is right for you, your individual circumstances and comfort level;
- If you are unvaccinated, please reconsider that decision if you can. Unvaccinated individuals are strongly encouraged to wear a mask indoors and physically distance;
- There are no capacity restrictions for gatherings and events;
- Wash your hands often; and
- Stay home if you are sick.

Telework - Transition to Optional Telework Approval Under Policy 11.9:

One purpose of this memo is to remind employees that any employee who prefers to return to their worksite full time are welcome and encouraged to do so. Telework is voluntary, not mandatory. Appointing authorities and supervisors need to be cognizant of this and refrain from discouraging a return to the worksite for those who



prefer to be there. Training and tools to manage a hybrid workforce have been developed and can be found on the [Telework Resources SharePoint site](#). Extended cabinet members and supervisors will be meeting this week for a presentation by the Department of Human Resources (DHR) on these new resources.

Next Steps for Voluntary Transition to Approved Telework Schedules by November 1:

Through September 1, 2021, employees who can perform their job duties while working remotely may continue to telework, with approval of the appointing authority. Any employee who prefers to return to the worksite either full or part-time may do so at any time. Kindly provide your supervisor with notice of your intent to do so.

If you have not returned to the worksite and are tentative about doing so because it has been a long time for some, you may want to consider easing into your worksite slowly during this transition period to grow accustomed to the change. The [Employee Assistance Program](#) is free and available to all permanent state employees and their family members. For more information visit the [Invest EAP website](#).

Beginning September 1, 2021 those employees who are certain they want to continue some level of remote work may submit a request under existing [Policy 11.9 Telework](#). No employee is required to submit a request to telework if their preference is to return to the worksite full-time before November 1, 2021, or if you are just unsure at this time. Those who request to remote work should be patient and not expect an immediate response. Agencies and departments will likely be reviewing a larger volume of requests than were normal pre-pandemic. It will take time to evaluate the requests against programmatic needs and Policy 11.9.

While these requests for approval to telework are being prepared and evaluated, continued telework will be permitted until a determination is made. Employees should expect to be working under an approved telework agreement or working on-site by November 1, 2021.

An employee is not precluded from requesting approval to telework at any time in the future beyond November 1st as the telework policy is intended to provide flexibility for state employees throughout their careers with the State and for use as individual circumstances and preferences change. Policy 11.9 was in effect pre-pandemic and remote work will remain an option for those who can telework in the future.

Telework Moving Forward and Next Steps:

Throughout the summer, leadership and supervisors have been developing plans for some level of voluntary telework at the agency, department, and program level. Employees who wish to continue to telework have most likely already discussed telework with their supervisor. If not, please contact your supervisor directly to learn about your program's ability to support telework. Additionally, supervisors can share whether your organization has formal telework guidelines in place, and if not, the [DHR's Model Telework Guidelines template](#) will be helpful for understanding eligibility and expectations. For more information on telework, including tools and guides, please visit [DHRs new SharePoint site](#).

Beginning September 1, 2021, those employees who wish to telework going forward may submit their requests to telework in accordance with Policy 11.9. The process to submit your request to telework can be found [here](#). Supervisors will accept and evaluate applications from employees for telework during the month of September 2021. Please take notice of more specific instructions regarding this process you may receive from your agency or department.

Employee notifications will be completed by October 15, 2021, wherever possible. Employees without an approved telework application should expect to return to full in-person work by November 1, 2021.



Training for Supervisors and Teleworkers:

Additional training for teleworkers and those who supervise teleworkers will be required and will be made available by September 10, 2021. A new Supervisor Training for managing remote/hybrid teams was launched on August 24, 2021. There is a series of five modules, with guides, which should not take longer than two hours to complete. The modules do not have to be taken over a single stretch of time.

Information on Vermont's Current Covid Cases:

Throughout this pandemic, decisions and recommendations have been driven by science and data and we have stayed the course throughout. Vermont has led the nation in our response, and we continue to lead today.

There has been much news of late of an increase in Covid cases, especially in other states with significantly lower vaccination rates and significantly higher hospitalizations than Vermont. Fortunately, Vermont continues to have the highest vaccination rates, hitting 85.5% of those eligible with at least one dose this week. We also continue to have the lowest hospitalization rate in the country.

Importantly, the data shows vaccines are preventing cases and have minimized the severity of symptoms in the unlikely instances that vaccinated individuals do contract Covid. We know vaccines are not 100% effective but in the rare cases where a fully vaccinated person does get it, they are unlikely to go to the hospital and are often asymptomatic.

The data proves that vaccines work. Of the more than 420,000 fully vaccinated Vermonters, only one-tenth of a percent (0.1%) have gotten Covid. And of this same vaccinated group, only 0.004 percent have been hospitalized and 0.002 percent have died, most of whom had other chronic conditions that contributed to this outcome. The current risk to Vermonters continues to be very, very low for those who are fully vaccinated.

Thus, based on the current science and data, we do not expect the case statistics to impact our return to the worksite and transition to remote work under Policy 11.9 as outlined above. We all acknowledge that this could change but with a daily increase in our vaccination rate and adherence to universal guidance and common sense, we remain optimistic.

I want to thank all State employees for their flexibility and commitment over the past months since the onset of the pandemic and acknowledge the work, spirit and determination you contributed to Vermont's emergency and ongoing recovery responses.

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