



Advocating for Older Adults of Today and Tomorrow

Commission on Aging's Workplace Flexibility Proposal Advances; Agency Estimates Potential Annual State Savings of \$22 Million

HARTFORD—Adopting and aggressively promoting flexible work schedules, phased-in retirement and telecommuting options for state employees could save millions of dollars a year, retain experienced staff and ultimately help solve Connecticut's looming workforce shortage, according to legislation proposed by the General Assembly's Connecticut Commission on Aging.

The options are contained in Senate Bill 1144 which was the subject of a March 23 public hearing before the General Assembly's Government Administration and Elections Committee.

"We've proposed this legislation as part of our ongoing public policy research initiative to 'redefine retirement' in Connecticut because it will assist in solving difficult workforce and budget-related issues now facing the state," said Commission on Aging Executive Director Julia Evans Starr.

Evans Starr said that as Connecticut's largest employer with more than 55,000 employees, the state could "lead by example" by adopting flexible worker-friendly initiatives that could save more than \$22 million annually.

The savings would occur if 7 percent of the state workforce agreed to a voluntary 10 percent schedule reduction. Flexible schedules would also result in energy savings and traffic congestion and pollution would be reduced, according to the commission's proposal.

The state Department of Administrative Services reports that in June 2008 17.7 percent of Connecticut's executive branch employees were eligible for retirement and by 2013 nearly 40 percent—or 15,000 people-- will be eligible.

If the state and private-sector employers adopted and aggressively promoted flexible arrangements, experienced older workers would continue on the job, enhancing their financial security and providing employers with necessary skilled labor.

As the oldest of Connecticut's one million baby boomers near retirement age, the state faces a severe shortage of younger workers to take their place. By 2010, fully 20 percent of Connecticut's workforce will be over the age of 55.

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of residents aged 25 to 34 (prime workforce age) declined by 20 percent, roughly twice the national average.

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In addition, Connecticut is a net exporter of recent college graduates. Between 1995 and 2000, the state lost approximately 7 percent of its 25-to-39-year old college-educated adults.

The legislation proposes flexible schedules where employees could voluntarily reduce their hours, maintain the same number of hours during four-day weeks or consider other options.

It also suggests a phased-in retirement plan where employees within five years of retirement eligibility could voluntarily reduce their schedules.

The proposal also recommends offering greater opportunities to telecommute. Gov. M Jodi Rell and other policymakers encourage companies in the private sector to allow telecommuting through the state Department of Transportation's Telecommute Connecticut! program.

"Private companies that offer flexible schedules experience lower turnover, less use of sick leave, increased employee productivity, improved morale and significant cost savings," Evans Starr said. "The state has an opportunity to lead the way in establishing a new paradigm for Connecticut's workforce."