



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

March 23, 2009

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Senate Bill 1144 - AN ACT CONCERNING FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES AND TELECOMMUTING OPTIONS FOR STATE EMPLOYEES

The Department of Public Health offers the following comments on HB 1144

Section 1 (a)

While the Department of Public Health supports the efforts to achieve cost savings advanced through this section, there is a concern over the lack of language enabling an agency to rescind approval under urgent, unforeseen circumstances. Without such language, the Department would have significant reservation about the minimum length of the initial approval (6 months) and the minimum length of an approved extension (also 6 months). The Department would anticipate greater levels of participation (and thus greater cost savings) with these suggested changes.

Section 2

The Department of Public Health supports the notion of flexible work schedule programs, but feels that such efforts should be accomplished through existing language in the collective bargaining agreements, and not through legislation. For several years, the Department has had in place flexible work schedule agreements with the bargaining units that represent our employees. Those agreements take into consideration the nature of our work, the needs of our customers, and practical matters such as security and safe access to our physical plants. In short, the development and implementation of successful flexible work schedule programs occurs best at the agency level, through channels and mechanisms that already exist.

Section 3

Although the department recognizes the value of the concept contained in this section, currently this type of retirement transition is possible through the Voluntary Schedule Reduction Program. This program currently allows agencies like DPH to retain seasoned, dedicated workers, while offering those same individuals the ability to transition into retirement (without the reduction in salary and service affecting the ultimate pension benefit). Furthermore, this permits succession planning and leadership development. Therefore, while DPH appreciates the intent of this section, the department does not see the need for further statutory mandate to implement the idea.

Section 4

DPH opposes the proposed changes to Section 5-248i of the general statutes. We note that the Department has several employees who participate in Telecommuting Agreements. While we recognize the benefits that a reduction in commuters can have on the environment and on traffic congestion, the primary bond between employer and employee is that there is a need for work to be done. Hence, "employee productivity" ought not be merely one of several reasons for approving such arrangements – employee productivity should be the central concern, as we all strive to ensure that taxpayers are served in a fiscally accountable manner. Additionally, we do not support changes that dictate a minimum amount of time for the arrangements; agencies need to be at liberty to exercise responsible discretion to discontinue arrangements. More latitude allowed to the agencies will enhance participation, thus increasing the level of benefit derived from these arrangements.

We thank the committee for its consideration of the department's views on this bill.



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