

With productivity threatened and the workforce strained, DOGE Chair Capriglione pushes forward with ideas for remote work for state employees

Vast majority of state agencies report that flexible work schedules have improved productivity, reduced costs, and strengthened recruitment efforts; Gov. Abbott's return to office order could cause more turnover, increase burnout and has already caused chaos with employees complaining hours wasted hours in Austin traffic could've been used instead for work

Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced workers to work remotely, many agencies have implemented telework arrangements.

According to a 2024 **Legislative Budget Board** study, of the 96 agencies surveyed about their remote work policies, the benefits are non-exhaustive.

29 agencies reported positive fiscal impacts, including reduced office space needs, fewer consumables and furniture needs. Only the **Texas Medical Board** and **10th Court of Appeals** reported negative fiscal impacts, citing higher supply, phone and Internet costs.

80 agencies reported having remote work and hybrid policies were better for recruitment and retention. 46 agencies reported an increase in productivity. 40 reported no change in productivity.

Yet Gov. **Greg Abbott's** return to office order could cause turnover, increase burnout and has already caused chaos with employees complaining the hours wasted hours in Austin traffic could've been used instead for work and returning to cramped and overcapacity spaces while they struggle to find parking.

DOGE Committee Chairman **Gio Capriglione's House Bill 5196**, which was heard in the committee last week, would create a framework for agencies to restart remote work for government employees.

The bill allows the state agency to offer telework arrangements in writing with clear expectations. Each agreement would be renewed annually. The arrangement could be revoked at any time.

"Flexible work policies work to attract, retain, and have a productive workforce," said **Ann Bishop**, who is executive director of the **Texas Public Employees Association**. Bishop previously served as the executive director of the **Texas Department of Information Resources** and **Employees Retirement System of Texas**.

"Do you remember any time in which you had a boss or supervisor that was not willing to let you have flexible time to do the things that you needed to do support your family life or others?" Rep. **Pat Curry** asked.

"One in particular. Mr. **Bullock** who was controller of public accounts. We had no time," she said with a laugh. "It was all Mr. Bullock's time."

Agency staff already must meet performance metrics and, at least as a courtesy, receive opportunities to respond to surveys related to work experience. "I see it is a great ability to attract and maintain a workforce as well as having a quality product. There are less distractions when you have your home

office. You do not have people coming by and trying to talk about the day or complaining about traffic or doing a lot of other things.

Chase Norris, who works for the **General Land Office**, and **Sam Bickley**, who works for the **Texas Commission on Environmental Quality**, recently told the **Committee on Delivery of Government Efficiency** their hybrid gigs worked well for them.

“I don't personally work out in the field anymore, but I know from previous jobs and water resources what it takes,” Bickley, a hydrologist, said. “Sometimes you need to be flexible. Maybe that requires traveling at a last-minute response to a hurricane or traveling to collect a water quality sample after a storm.”

But some lawmakers were skeptical of codifying any form of telework. And the witnesses were quick to push back.

35 percent of **TCEQ** employees will be eligible for retirement within the next five years, according to the agency's [workforce plan](#). “They've been working this schedule for the last five years. So, if you're weighing the options, ‘do I want to go driving into Austin every day as we're about to start construction on 35?’ That seems to me like a, a value proposition,” Bickley replied.

Skeptics of their arguments, including Reps. **David Cook** and **Mike Olcott**, received forceful pushback from witnesses.

“Are you implying that if someone is near retirement and they're required to come back to the office, that they would just retire?” Cook asked. “It sounds like you're saying that it's an inconvenience to come to work.”

“We're not returning to work. We're returning at the office,” Bickley replied. “We're already working.”

“You said it would actually hurt morale to return to the office?” asked Rep. **Mike Olcott**.

“I assume you drive into Austin every day as well?” Bickley asked.

“Okay,” Olcott said.

“Yeah,” Bickley said unflinchingly.

Olcott had no other questions.

The bill was left pending.

By James Russell

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