Script for ‘Challenges with Telework during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency – Executive Branch Agencies’

*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Krista Baker-Hernandez. I’m a manager with LLA Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Challenges with Telework during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency – Executive Branch Agencies.”

This report provides the results of our evaluation of the use of telework among the state’s executive branch agencies during the COVID-19 emergency. The purpose of this audit was to provide information on the challenges the agencies experienced.

We conducted two surveys as part of our work. The first survey was sent to leaders in 32 agencies and offices to gather information on the challenges they faced managing their agencies during telework. The response rate was 62.5 percent.

The second survey was sent to approximately 40,000 employees in the same 32 agencies and offices to understand their experiences with telework. The response rate for this survey was 27.6 percent

We also researched best practices from the federal government and the Society for Human Resource Management, as well as other states’ experiences with telework.

We found most Louisiana agencies did not have telework policies in place before the pandemic. In contrast, the federal government began establishing telework policies in 2000 with approximately 42 percent of federal employees eligible to telework in 2018.

In addition, states such as Washington, Nebraska, Tennessee, and Utah routinely use telework and Florida, California, Connecticut, North Carolina, Oregon, and Virginia all had telework statutes or policies in place before the COVID-19 emergency.

The benefits of telework include improved employee job attitudes and performance, improved recruitment and retention of prospective and high-performing employees, and potential reductions in the amount of required real estate and utilities costs. The pandemic has also shown that telework can help ensure the continuity of operations during emergencies.

In Louisiana, our survey showed 56.3 percent of agencies and offices had no telework policy. In addition, only 16.3 percent of employees reported teleworking on a regular or intermittent schedule before the pandemic. Exceptions included the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness and the Department of Children and Family Services, both of which had routine telework programs in place before the pandemic.

We also found agencies did not consistently accommodate non-essential employees whose job duties could not be performed during telework. For example, some agencies assigned employees duties that could be performed remotely, while others required employees to use leave.

In addition, we found that technology challenges, such as inadequate equipment and connectivity problems, were the most common barriers employees faced with telework. Agencies that relied on paper for their business processes faced more challenges than those with automated processes.

According to our survey, 83.6 percent of the agency leaders and 47.2 percent of staff reported experiencing technology challenges. These included a lack of equipment, problems with Internet connectivity, and lack of software that allowed collaboration such as digital signature software, instant messaging platforms, and web conferencing.

We also found agencies did not always provide supervisors with sufficient guidance on how to manage their remote teams or how to measure and track employee productivity. According to our survey, 26.6 percent of agency supervisors reported difficulties in leading their remote teams, including maintaining productivity while also balancing the needs of their staff.

As a result of our surveys, we made five recommendations. Among them, the Department of State Civil Service – or Civil Service, for short – should develop minimum standards for state agency telework policies.

In addition, Civil Service should help agencies develop telework policies to ensure the agencies identify how they will accommodate non-essential employees whose job duties may not be conducive to working from home. We also recommended that Civil Service develop rules to standardize the use of leave for non-essential staff whose job duties do not allow them to telework during emergencies.

We recommended, too, that the Office of Technology Services – or OTS – helpagencies develop policies that outline the different technologies needed for successful telework, including whether laptops will be issued, what platforms should be used for communication, and how business processes that rely on paper will not be interrupted.

Finally, we recommended that Civil Service helpagencies create telework agreements for every teleworker that include such items as duration of agreement, remote work site locations, communication expectations, telework schedule, performance expectations, and equipment to be provided by the agency.

In their response to our report, which is detailed in the report appendix, Civil Service officials agreed with the four recommendations directed at their department. OTS officials agreed with the recommendation related to technology policies for telework.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*