

House Joint Resolution 144: Opportunities for Telework July 12, 2006 Meeting Summary

The joint subcommittee created by House Joint Resolution 144 to study telework opportunities for public and private sector employees held its first meeting on July 12 in Richmond. The joint subcommittee elected Delegate Timothy D. Hugo, the patron of HJ 144, as chairman of the joint subcommittee and Senator Jeannemarie Devolites Davis as vice-chairman of the joint subcommittee.

Delegate Hugo indicated that there are three key drivers in establishing a telework policy in the Commonwealth. The first, congestion mitigation, is particularly relevant to regions such as Northern Virginia. The membership of the joint subcommittee is largely comprised of representatives from this region. However, the other two drivers -- preparing for continuity of government operations in the event of a disaster and cost savings -- are of statewide interest and importance.

Senator Devolites Davis indicated that she is interested in issues related to continuity of government that relate to teleworking, such as the need to have a sound policy in place in the event of a possible pandemic or homeland security event. She thinks that it is important that the work of the joint subcommittee look at mandating the implementation of telework policies by the administration, and look into how to best enforce compliance with the policy by state agencies. After reviewing telework in state agencies, the group should also review teleworking opportunities in the private sector.

Staff presented an overview of the mandates of HJ 144. Primarily the joint subcommittee is charged with identifying the state agencies whose operations are most conducive to telework or alternative work schedules; recommending incentives to increase the prevalence of telework; examining the impact of increased telework opportunities on continuity of government; reviewing the appropriateness of establishing a pilot telework program involving one or more state agency; and developing criteria for measuring the productivity of employees who telework.

Staff also provided an overview of the current law and policies in the Commonwealth regarding telework. A copy of the initial staff report is available on the joint subcommittee's homepage. Currently, the law requires that all agencies establish a telework policy and report annually to the Secretary of Administration as to participation in the program. Discussion, however, revealed that there is little enforcement available to ensure that all agencies comply with this reporting. In addition, some agencies' policies simply declare that all of its employees are ineligible for telecommuting. Based on the most recent reported data from 2005, only about 770 out of more than 70,000 state employees telework.

Next, the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) provided an overview of its involvement in promoting telework opportunities in the Commonwealth. DRPT has been involved in telework since the early 1990s, as part of its efforts to reduce the number of vehicles on the road in the Commonwealth. Most recently, DRPT has been

administering a program that provides financial incentives to private companies in the Northern Virginia region to create or expand telework programs. They are now looking at ways to develop a non-incentive based program to implement in the rest of the state, and are developing learning modules about telework for online distribution.

Delegate Hugo asked that the members of the joint subcommittee think about ideas for the development of a study work plan. Members indicated that they would like to look into how many agencies have identified qualified employees eligible for telework. It was suggested that the joint subcommittee should hear from agencies who have declared all of their employees ineligible for telework, to gain an understanding as to why this is occurring. Members also expressed an interest in reviewing how productivity is best measured for employees who telework. Other issues for possible review include the minimum technology required for teleworking, and an examination of Fairfax County's telework program. Recent data from Fairfax County indicates that close to 20% of its workforce is participating in its telework program.

The next meeting of the joint subcommittee has not yet been set. Meeting materials, for this meeting are available on the joint subcommittee's website at <http://dls.state.va.us/telework.htm>.