House Joint Resolution 144 (2006) was created to study the ways in which telework opportunities for state and private sector employees can be enhanced and increased. The availability of new technologies makes teleworking not only an attractive option for public and private employee flexibility and convenience, but it also, with proper planning, can provide for continuity of essential government services in the event of a disaster.

The joint subcommittee, chaired by Delegate Timothy D. Hugo, met three times during the 2006 Interim. At its first meeting, the committee learned about current law in Virginia governing telework of state employees. Specifically, the Code of Virginia requires state agencies to adopt policies regarding telework and alternative work schedules. Such policies must allow for participation by eligible employees, and must declare which, if any positions, are not eligible for telework or alternative schedules. If a position is declared ineligible, the policy must include justification for this declaration. Therefore, in theory, the policy would presume that all positions are eligible for telework, absent a justification to the contrary. In practice, however, most agencies have not adopted a robust telework practice.

During the course of the Interim, the joint subcommittee learned about the participation of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) in promoting telework in Virginia. DRPT has been actively involved in telework since the early 1990s, prompted largely by its effort to reduce the number of vehicles on the road in the Commonwealth. Most recently, DRPT has been involved in providing incentives to private companies in the Northern Virginia region to create or expand telework programs.

The joint subcommittee also received presentations on three very successful telework programs in the Commonwealth from the Department of Taxation, and the counties of Fairfax and Loudoun. The Department of Taxation has in place one of the broadest-reaching telework programs amongst state agencies. This program was borne out of necessity when, due to fiscal restraints in 2003, the Department closed its regional offices and converted its workforce into teleworkers. The Department, and the two counties, presented a number of "lessons learned" to the joint subcommittee for consideration.

During the 2006 Interim, other developments related to telework emerged across the Commonwealth, and the joint subcommittee was briefed on each initiative. Through Executive Order 35, the Office of Governor created an Office of Telework Promotion and Broadband Assistance -- a collaborative, cross-secretariat effort. As part of the order, the Governor announced a goal of having 20% of the eligible workforce at each state agency teleworking at least one day a week by 2010. In addition, the Department of Human Resource Management completed a survey of the telework practices of state agencies, seeking to document the number of teleworkers at each agency, the inclusion of telework in continuity of operation plans, and the perceived benefits and barriers to telework. Finally, the Council on Technology Services created a workgroup dedicated to developing a mobile workforce. The workgroup was in the process of identifying and documenting best practices that would make it easier for managers to pursue telework programs.

One of the mandates of the joint subcommittee was to examine the impact of telework on the continuity of government operations in the event of a natural or manmade disaster. To assist with this discussion, the joint subcommittee received a background briefing on continuity of operations planning from the Office of Commonwealth Preparedness.

The joint subcommittee will continue its meetings during the 2007 Interim in order to gather more information about telework and to develop recommendations. A final report will be compiled at the completion of the two-year study.