

# Telework Now and in the Future

**By Stephanie Perkins, Council 1st VP, Detroit**

On March 19, 2020, OMB issued an MOU, “*Updated Guidance on Telework Flexibilities in Response to Coronavirus.*”

This MOU was issued, per OMB, to “ensure that department and agency leaders assertively safeguard the health and safety of their workforce.”

According to this MOU, all Federal Executive Branch departments and agencies were encouraged to maximize telework flexibilities to eligible employees within populations that CDC identified at higher risk for serious

complications from COVID19, including pregnant women.

The OMB MOU went on to state that agencies do not need to require certification by a medical professional and may accept self-identification by any employee that is in one of these populations. This is how our journey began. Next steps will be EEOC submitting a re-entry plan and getting administration approval, followed by union bargaining.

The Agency has stated a return is not anticipated until after the fiscal year. In the mean time, not only have we stayed safe, but we have learned

new ways of doing our work remotely and proven that telework works.

Council of EEOC Locals, #216 has been made aware that many EEOC bargaining unit employees would like for these expanded telework flexibilities be carried over upon our eventual return to our respective offices. We are planning on opening up dialogue with the Agency on this very subject; and while we cannot predict the end result of such discussions, we are committed to seriously engaging the Agency on this topic.

We will keep you posted and until then, we hope that you take care and stay safe.

## Skyrocketing Productivity Shattered My Telework Concerns



**By Shawna Melva, Investigator, Local 3230, San Diego Local Office**

Telework was something I always shunned and never had serious thoughts about. The fear of productivity drop-off because of the distractions of home was the major reason. Add television, a well-stocked refrigerator, a busy cell phone, and two very affectionate dogs that would only make productivity worse. Plus, who wants to haul case files and a laptop for one little day of telework per week? I just could not see myself participating. Telework was more of a hassle than anything else, I thought. Eight-thirty-to-five was perfectly workable, something I could live with. The government provided me a transit card, so it was office-or-bust!

Now, thanks to the pandemic, telework is something I cannot live without! Although being thrown into it for an

unspecified period was scary and new, I quickly found out telework was manageable. Besides, COVID-19 was just a virus and it would end soon. (Insert laugh track here!)

One year later, I am thriving in the telework environment, ironically, because office distractions have been eliminated. I did not realize all the noise that was going on at work, even in a local office of nine employees, and

one non-stop copy machine outside my door was gone. The earplugs I once depended upon so much now remain unused in a desk drawer.

A few things come to mind that are not missed. At home, I can sleep two extra hours. No more rushing out the door and wasting gas getting to the trolley, just to ride one stop to the office. No more worrying about finding a parking spot by the trolley station. Elimination of the costly lunches in the surrounding neighborhood. No more waiting for the microwave or expired food in the stinky office fridge. The only thing I do miss is walking into a company as a leggy, long-haired, six-foot blonde, throwing witnesses off their interview preparation, during an on-site investigation!

Intake, a process that continues to be poorly managed, has been improved

working from home. Instead of rushing to get charging parties to sign a Form 5, we simply send the charge language electronically. The best part is that I can use the complete two hours of appointment time to find out what is going on. In the office, we were rushed to finish the appointment or to use the restroom before the next appointment. (Intake MOU of fifteen minutes between Intake appointments? - Insert your laugh track here!) The cherry on top of “Intake by Home” includes turning off my microphone to slurp some coffee so desperately needed in the morning, as all food and drink (except water) is banned from Intake interview rooms in our office.

Being thrown into telework has been a welcome challenge that I thrive on daily. It is quite funny to realize the real distraction for my workday was the office itself. There is no reason to return to an office environment full of distractions. For over a year, investigators have proven we can do the job at home. Conversations with management locally have shown the only tasks we truly need to continue in-person are some on-site investigations. I will fight hard with my union to stay home, produce at a high level, and enjoy the company of my loving, furry friends.