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County of Erie

MARK POLONCARZ
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DATE: March 10, 2025
TO: CSEA Local 815
FROM: Cindy A. Nitzer, Supervisor Special Investigation Division
RE: Work From Home

Good morning,

I would like to address the burdens the abrupt change in the work from home policy:

The Commissioner of Social Services states that one of the main reasons for the change is to enhance collaboration and team dynamics. As a Supervisor I will assure you this is false. When work from home was first implemented I had a team meeting to outline how we will stay connected as a team and communicate, ideas were presented and my team decided on what best met their needs. We had weekly meetings, when in office chair yoga, walks on lunch and each member had a team member to contact in my absence. Prior to WFM this wasn't a part of our team unity. It's the absence that makes the heart grow fonder, the time we are in the office we enjoy each other the break is much needed and 100% being in the office harms the harmony created from WFH.

When I am working from home I can complete at least double the amount of work when I am in the office. There are several distractions, interruptions for questions, comments, and general conversations, noises from copier, people moving about the office and telephone calls. At home there is a quiet work space that improves accuracy and production. When I learned of the change I documented work progress. At home I was able to review 14 cases the days I am in the office it reduces to 6. Prior to COVID this was a constant complaint and concern of mine. Due to the nature of my job in examining cases for prosecution and civil recovery a quiet work place is essential for the accuracy of the review. Our office was designed as an open floor plan and supervisors do not have the privacy of individual rooms to complete their work and are subject to the noises in the office. This also effects the staff as I have seen an increase in errors and production and decrease since even the one added day as been added to coming into the office.

This change is being made very abruptly and has caused mental, physical and financial stress. One of the greatest benefits of work from home is not being amongst the elements of downtown or in the office spreading illness. Summers the air is terrible regulated leaving artic temperatures that effect neck and back pain. Winters you are in the office with staff with colds, flus, sniffles with germs unnecessarily being spread. I have documented bronchitis, I used to see the doctor several times. When WFH was implemented the amount of times I had to see the doctor last year was a total of 4 times for the entire year and that is without any other lifestyle changes.



County of Erie

MARK POLONCARZ
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Lunch hours at home you can relax, walk, read and clear your mind for a productive afternoon. In the office there is no stress relief. It is unsafe to walk (I had 2 staff members break bones from conditions downtown) and every corner you are concerned with peddlers or individuals considered dubious at best.

The administration is acting on an assumption of what they believe relates to work place unity in fact what they are proposing will result in the opposite.

Thank you for hearing my concerns,

Cindy A. Nitzer

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cindy A. Nitzer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cindy A. Nitzer
Special Investigation Division
716-858-1859

Date March 10, 2025
To CSEA Local 815
From Jackie Tunis-Garcia
Senior Social Welfare Examiner
Special Investigations Division

To Whom it May Concern,

Before voting in favor of our current contract I did discuss, at length, with union representatives and inquired about the WFH policy and asked specifically if this could or would be changed and I was told that IF it were to change our entire contract would need to be "reopened" to increase pay to make it a benefit to members to return to the office.

Erie County requiring me to return to the office four days a week will cause me undue hardship in the following ways:

An unnecessary increase in my parking expenses

An unnecessary increase in my gas expense

An unnecessary increase in wear and tear on my vehicle

An unnecessary increase in stress due to driving in the inclement weather

An unnecessary increase in commute time

An unnecessary increase in stress due to walking in the icy, snow-covered conditions that exist in the downtown area. I slipped on the ice and broke my leg three years ago and the added stress that brings to me is debilitating

When working from home there are ways for me to de-stress during my breaks and come back to my desk feeling refreshed and ready to work again. Downtown does not offer any safe ways to decompress. I have attempted to go on walks, and it does not feel safe for me to even walk to the library alone, so I am still sitting at my desk even during my breaks. Just this week I tried to go outside for my break and there was some sort of chaos going on out in front of the building and I was forced to go back up to my desk.

I am committed to watching my grandchildren and my daughter relies on me on my three WFH days as my daughter drops them off at my home at 5:05 PM to be to work by 5:30. If I am working downtown, I cannot possibly be home in time for her to drop off the children and make it to her job on time. The change in my WFH schedule is having a ripple effect on my daughter's family as well.

I tend to get more work accomplished when working from home than when I am in the office due to the number of distractions that are in the office environment. People walking through the office, deliveries being made, etc..

My job is to review and present cases for Administrative Disqualification Hearings. Accuracy in reviewing these cases is very important for presentation. Trying to do this while in the office is quite difficult with the commotion and disruptions that occur. While working from home I can accomplish reviewing many more cases with much more accuracy. Being in the office 1-2 days a week to copy, scan, and mail necessary packets is more than sufficient and additional days in the office are not productive.

An increase in spreading and catching colds and flus which then causes me to have to use sick time that could be avoided if I am working from home more and in the office less.

Respectfully submitted



Jackie Garcia
Senior Social Welfare Examiner
Special Investigations Division
716-858-8821

Svensson, Erik

From: Svensson, Erik
Sent: Friday, March 7, 2025 11:37 AM
To: erieunitpresident@csea815.com; contactus.csea815@gmail.com
Subject: Addressing the changes to the WFH program

I wanted to address the recent change requiring employees to work in the office three days a week instead of two. While I understand the intent behind this decision, I'd like to share my unique circumstances and request flexibility to continue working from home two days a week.


As a parent of a 16-year-old with autism, consistency in my schedule is crucial to her well-being. Even small changes to my availability can cause her significant distress, which in turn impacts my ability to fully focus on work. In addition, I homeschool three children who occasionally need my assistance during the day. Working from home for three days allows me to balance their educational needs during my lunch hour as well as before and after work without compromising my job performance.

Transportation costs are another significant concern. With gas prices still high and the wear and tear on my vehicle increasing, the additional commute day adds unnecessary expenses that strain my household budget. This is particularly challenging as the cost of living continues to rise while wages remain static.

Healthcare costs have also risen considerably. My premiums and prescription expenses for my family have increased, further impacting our finances. The additional commuting days exacerbate this strain, making it harder to manage daily expenses.

The previous two-day in-office requirement struck a good balance, allowing me to meet both my personal and professional obligations effectively. Increasing the in-office requirement to three days a week disrupts this balance, creating challenges for my family and our budget.

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 3/10/25



County of Erie

MARK POLONCARZ
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DATE: March 10, 2025
TO: CSEA Local 815
FROM: Susan Peterson, Sr Social Welfare Examiner
Special Investigation Division

Good morning,

I recently received the email on the proposed change in work from home from 3 days in the office to 4 and I would like to address the negative impact this will have on my work production, mental stress, financial burden and physical stress.

My job is to review cases for Administrative Disqualifications Hearings. The accuracy of these cases is major since we are seeking disqualification of individuals for falsifying applications for assistant. Office commotion, interruptions and conversations in the office makes this task very difficult. When I am at home I can read these cases quietly and identify the key factors in the cases to achieve an agency affirmation. The few days in the office I am able to make the necessary copies, mailings and scan needed to do this job; additional day in office is not productive. My production at home is double then what it is when I am in the office.

I broke my arm when leaving the office to get some fresh air on my lunch. Our office was freezing and I decided to utilize my one hour lunch to warm up. I had to jump back to the curb when a car sped around the corner causing me to lose my balance and break my wrist. I am so afraid now to leave the office without assistance that I find myself stuck at my desk all day. By the end of the day I am mentally exhausted. This doesn't happen when I am able to work from home, I am in the safety of my own home.

I have a documented disability and unable to drive or take public transportation. I have a paratransit pass and am often unable to secure this method. Alternative is uber which cost me \$30 each way for \$60/day. The county has a reimbursement of a taxable \$40 which only covers one way for one day of my commute. The proposal to add another day to 4 days a week in the office is financially strangling and unnecessary.

Working from home has strengthened my teams unity as we reach out to each other for discussions, questions and meeting. We work on team building and appreciate the days apart of from each other.

Thank you for hearing my concerns,

Susan Peterson

I am a newer county employee, and I would like to remain anonymous because I am not yet vested in the pension system and do not want to risk losing my job and benefits. I am writing because I am not happy about the county's recent announcement of a blanket one day per week only work from home policy. I was laid off in 2021, and my wife and I were weighing my options, we decided that I would leave a field I'd been in for more than 15 years and begin working for the county because of the chance to work from home. I am able to work up to three days from home per week, and this has been great because it has enabled my wife and I to remain a one-vehicle household. She often is on the road, and when her job takes her farther out, my ability to work from home is a godsend.

There are rumblings from higher-ups about how we have become spoiled with work from home, but if anything, it has made my colleagues and me more productive and happier (heaven forbid employees should be happy). Recently I have seen announcements pertaining to the county holding job fairs to fill county positions - something you would have never seen years ago because everyone was clamoring to work for the county because of the benefits. It is apparent that the county no longer offers enough incentive to work in these thankless, traumatic and sometimes dangerous jobs, and taking away work from home will be the last straw for some people, especially those who could have retired by now. Things are only going to get worse with staff shortages, and the quality of work is going to suffer.

Thank you,

A Concerned Employee