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PFA Board Approves Situational Remote Work Policy in New Employee Handbook Amid Growing Workforce

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Janeka Simon **September 10, 2023**

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The question of whether to require a complete return to in-person work is intensifying across the country, revealing an employment landscape that has shifted significantly since schools, offices, and businesses shut down over three years ago. Some employers, in the face of worker resistance to full-time, in office work schedules, have provided [incentives](#), while others have resorted to [threats](#).

At a meeting of the board of the V.I. Public Finance Authority (PFA) [late last month](#), a discussion over employee policies turned to the subject of remote work considerations. PFA Staff Counsel Lorelei Farrington, who was presenting a new personnel handbook to the board for approval, said that telework or remote work by PFA employees would now be considered on a “situational” basis.

“There are several criteria that the employee must meet,” Ms. Farrington explained. “Several considerations that must be looked at: their past and current performance levels, past and current attendance, dependability, trustworthiness, effective communication, self-motivation, their ability to work independently, productivity, their ability to prioritize work and meet deadlines and manage time,” the attorney noted.

Fielding questions from the board, Ms. Farrington explained that the possibility of remote work would be contingent on the job requirements of the employee requesting that option. “There will be an agreement that must be signed that would spell out the terms of that,” she said, with expectations – including place of work – being hammered out “based on discourse between the employee and manager,” Attorney Farrington continued. Some jobs may allow for 100% remote work, while others may require some or all of an employee’s time be spent in office, PFA Director of Finance and Administration Nathan Simmonds explained further.

Figuring out a sensible remote work policy was important now, Ms. Farrington said, as the PFA’s current workforce of about 35 was expected to grow to “approximately 100 people when positions are filled,” according to the attorney, as staff from the CDBG program move to the PFA’s Office of Disaster Recovery.

Board Member Dorothy Isaacs expressed concern about whether employee morale would be affected by an uneven application of the policy, with differing expectations for different members of staff. “Employees could begin to feel that one person can spend most of their time at home and another one can’t,” she said, suggesting that there be a minimum requirement of two days spent in office for all employees. Ms. Isaacs argued that maintaining relationships between co-workers was made more difficult when people were not physically present in the same space. “I see a lot of problems,” she predicted.

“Right now, we’re at capacity in terms of physical space,” Mr. Simmonds noted, saying that allowing some employees the option to perform their tasks remotely could help the PFA grow without immediately needing additional physical space. “We may be hiring an employee to do a task that they can do remotely. Why would we not allow that to happen?” Mr. Simmonds also reiterated that a request for telework was not an entitlement, but argued that the policy should “maintain flexibility.”

He rebutted Ms. Isaac’s contention that the stated policy was so flexible as to be “ad hoc,” while Attorney Farrington explained that someone in the role of receptionist, for example, would necessarily need to be in the office, while another employee in a finance role may only need to come in a few times a week. “It’s very hard to have an across-the-board policy, because everybody’s...duties or responsibilities vary so much.”

At the end of the discussion, which presented similar benefits and highlighted similar concerns as those raised in debates on the issue in boardrooms around the country and the world, the PFA board voted to include the telework policy in the new employee handbook. An updated maternity leave policy that complies with new federal regulations was also adopted by the PFA Board.