Labor and Economic Opportunity

State workgroup to recommend in-person office work policies

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State convenes Return-to-Office Workgroup of business, labor and public health leaders to make recommendations on returning to work safely

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As Michigan ramps up vaccine distribution, more employers and workers are preparing to return to in-person office work in some form. To support this process, the State has established the new Return-to-Office Workgroup consisting of business, labor, and public health experts to provide Gov. Whitmer with concise recommendations that will be used to inform MDHHS orders and MIOSHA rules as well as standards and best practices for employers to use in planning their own phased reopening.

Even as COVID-19 cases are down from the winter peak, workplace safety remains a concern. As reported to MDHHS by local public health departments, office workplaces have had 275 outbreaks over the last six months, sixth among all settings. This data demonstrates the need for a strong partnership between diverse stakeholders and subject matter experts who can help develop a phased return-to-office work strategy that ensures the protection of Michiganders.

"Our priority remains the health and safety of Michigan workers and workplaces. Throughout the pandemic, we have worked closely with employers to provide strategies for safer in-person work and this group is an extension of that

collaboration," said Michigan COVID-19 Workplace Safety Director Sean Egan. "Congregation in any setting creates risk, employers have implemented innovative approaches to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and bringing this new group together will provide a mechanism to capture key insights to align policies with best practices and health guidance."

The advisory group will provide ongoing guidance and will meet weekly with their first meeting scheduled for March 18. Guidelines are constantly evolving as the health environment improves and the new group will be engaged in those changes and be a key advisor. The State of Michigan will also consult state legislators regarding the phased-in return to in-person office work.

Currently, MIOSHA's emergency rules require employers to develop policies to determine whether remote work for employees is feasible to help ensure that COVID-19 transmission is mitigated to the maximum extent possible. The rules do not prohibit in-person work. Remote work is a strategy to minimize in-person contacts and is included in guidance from the CDC and Federal OSHA to protect employees in the workplace.

An extension of the emergency rules is expected, consistent with a phased-in return based on guidance from the group, updated health data, and consultation with appropriate health experts. MIOSHA will soon begin the formal rulemaking process for COVID-19 workplace safety rules. These rules will accommodate a smooth transition back to normal once the pandemic ends.

Return-to-Office Workgroup members:

- Dr. Kate Birdsall, president, MSU Union of Nontenure-Track Faculty, AFT
- Tim Carroll, safety specialist, Office of State Employer
- Susan Corbin, director, LEO
- Sean Egan, COVID-19 workplace safety director, LEO
- Rachel Eubanks, state treasurer, Dept. of Treasury
- Tina Culver, president, Communication Workers of America, Local 4009
- Dr. Natahsa Bagdasarian, senior public health physician, MDHHS
- Elizabeth Hertel, director, MDHHS
- Harry Kemp, senior VP, general counsel and corporate secretary, Lear Corporation
- Dr. Pranav Kothari, chief of healthcare strategy, Rock Family of Companies
- Grace Lee, president and CEO, Ashford Connex

- Lois Murray, president, AFSCME, Local 2172
- Hannah Naltner, chief of staff, Steelcase
- Lisa Peacock, health officer, Health Dept. of Northwest Michigan
- Tameka Ramsey, owner, T. Ramsey & Associates.
- Mayor Andy Schor, City of Lansing
- Ryan Sebolt, director of government affairs, Michigan AFL-CIO
- Mike Turnquist, senior deputy director, state facilities administration, DTMB
- Ryan Weiss, counsel, U.S. operations, regulatory and North America, Dow Chemical Company
- Alena Zachery-Ross, superintendent, Ypsilanti Community Schools

"The establishment of this group ensures the recommendations will be based on real-world feedback from a diverse set of business, labor and public health experts," said Dr. Pranav Kothari, director of health care strategy for the Rock Family of Companies. "The members of this group have been navigating the unique COVID-19 challenges in their field and are prepared to make informed recommendations. Partnerships like this are essential so we can all get back to work safely."

"Often, the voice of the employee is lost in conversations about returning to work," said Tina Fuller, president, Communication Workers of America, Local 4009. "We're proud to partner with the state as they prioritize these voices by including them in the advisory group. This structure will ensure that the voice of the worker is present, and influential, as rules are modified and continue to be updated with employee safety and health in mind."

The advisory group complements the collaborative work that MIOSHA and other state agencies are currently performing with businesses in the field. This work includes the MIOSHA Ambassador Program where over 2,000 businesses have been provided free education and one-on-one guidance to understand regulations on workplace safety. Ambassadors work directly with business owners and managers to implement safety directives to help ensure a safe workplace for employees and customers.

To learn more about the efforts to support a safe reopening in Michigan, visit Michigan.gov/COVIDWorkplaceSafety .

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