



June 15, 2026

**To: Members of the Senate Governmental Organization Committee**

**From: WorkLife Law at UC Law SF**

**Re: SUPPORT – AB 1729 (Lee) – State Telework Modernization**

The Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California College of Law, SF is pleased to support AB 1729 (Lee). WorkLife Law is a national research and advocacy organization that advances gender and racial equity by strengthening legal rights for pregnant people and family caregivers, so that they may meet their obligations to both.

AB 1729 would modernize California’s state telework statute by establishing a clear statewide framework for telework policies, requiring state agencies to offer telework where operationally feasible, and creating transparency measures—including a statewide dashboard to track cost savings, efficiency gains, and other benefits associated with telework programs. AB 1729 directly advances WorkLife Law’s core mission: ensuring that workers are not forced to choose between their jobs and their families.

### **Telework Is a Gender Equity Imperative**

The option to telework is a gender equity issue at its core. Caregiving responsibilities remain a primary driver of gender inequality in the labor force, and rigid, inflexible workplace structures fall hardest on women. Telework is one of the most effective, immediately available tools to address that inequity—and AB 1729 would prevent it from being ripped away from the hundreds of thousands of Californians who work for the state.

The outdated 9-to-5 in-office model assumes a second adult is at home (stereotypically, a wife) who can absorb caregiving responsibilities. That assumption has never reflected the reality of many working families, and it fits even fewer today, particularly given the high cost of living in California. Without flexibility, workers with family responsibilities are forced to choose between providing adequate care to their children, aging parents, or family members with disabilities, and keeping their jobs.

The research bears this out. A 25% increase in the availability of remote work jobs increases women’s overall labor force participation by approximately 3%, with mothers’ employment rising by roughly 4%.<sup>1</sup> At a 50% increase in availability, these gains more than double—to roughly 6.8% for women overall and 8.7% for mothers.<sup>2</sup> Remote work can also reduce the discrimination mothers face in hiring: one study found that the “motherhood penalty” decreased significantly when employers were hiring for hybrid

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<sup>1</sup> Hira Farooqi, *Telework Availability and Women's Labor Market Outcomes* (Ctr. for Global Dev. Working Paper, 2023), available at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ILLTWesAOuvFDENFxlIkH-2rXgo\\_ZWdC/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ILLTWesAOuvFDENFxlIkH-2rXgo_ZWdC/view).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

positions.<sup>3</sup> Given that bias against mothers is the strongest form of gender bias against women, this is a striking finding.

The harmful—but avoidable—consequences of forcing employees back into offices have already played out nationally. Between January and June 2025, 212,000 women age 20 and older left the U.S. workforce while 44,000 men joined it—coinciding with a sharp rise in full-time in-office requirements among large employers.<sup>4</sup> Labor force participation among women ages 25 to 44 with a child under five fell nearly three percentage points over the same period, reversing gains made in 2022 through 2024.<sup>5</sup> A study of more than three million workers found that female employees were significantly more likely to leave their jobs following return-to-office mandates, with turnover increasing at nearly three times the rate of male employees.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond workforce participation, working remotely can itself reduce discrimination against women at work. A 2025 study of more than 1,000 professional women in hybrid roles found that 31% reported experiencing gender discrimination in a typical month while working in the office, compared to only 17% while working remotely.<sup>7</sup> For women in male-dominated workplaces, the gap was even starker: a 58% likelihood of discrimination on-site, compared to 26% when remote.<sup>8</sup>

We fear that the Governor’s July 1 return-to-office directive will deprive state employees of these documented equity benefits associated with remote work. Requiring tens of thousands of state workers—many who were originally hired into remote work positions—to now report in person imposes a significant and disproportionate burden on women. Families will be left without affordable childcare arrangements that account for long commutes and without the flexibility to work in geographic proximity to family members. In countless cases, they will weigh whether continued full-time employment is feasible at all, and many will leave.

AB 1729 would ensure that decisions to limit telework are made thoughtfully and transparently, based on a genuine accounting of operational feasibility, rather than through blanket mandates that do not meet the needs of so many women workers.

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<sup>3</sup> Claire Daviss, Emma Williams-Baron & Erin Macke, *Hiring the Ideal Remote Worker: The Gendered Implications of the Rise of Remote Work* (Social Forces Working Paper, Sept. 2025), available at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VUu0uPzxsC1C--NIWmCZzlaAfS\\_8uVYk/view?pli=1](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VUu0uPzxsC1C--NIWmCZzlaAfS_8uVYk/view?pli=1).

<sup>4</sup> Alana Semuels, *Why So Many Women Are Quitting the Workforce*, TIME (Mar. 11, 2026), available at <https://time.com/7306896/women-leaving-workforce/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Yuye Ding, Mark S. Ma, Betty Xing, Yucheng Yang & Zhao Jin, *Return to Office Mandates, Brain Drain and Gender Difference* (SSRN Working Paper, Nov. 23, 2024), available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=5031481](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5031481).

<sup>7</sup> Laura Doering & András Tilcsik, *Location Matters: Everyday Gender Discrimination in Remote and On-Site Work* (SSRN Working Paper, 2025), available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=5571900](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5571900).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

## **Remote Work Advances Racial and Disability Equity, Too**

The equity stakes of this bill extend beyond gender. Research shows that people of color are more likely to search for positions that allow remote work,<sup>9</sup> and are more likely to leave their employment in response to return-to-office mandates.<sup>10</sup> For these workers, working remotely reduces daily exposure to racial microaggressions and discrimination that increase stress and decrease psychological safety.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, one 2021 study found that just 3% of Black knowledge workers wanted to return to full-time in-office work, compared to 21% of their white counterparts, and that hybrid and remote arrangements doubled Black workers' sense of belonging.<sup>12</sup>

For workers with disabilities, telework is often necessary to make equal workplace participation possible.<sup>13</sup> Labor force participation among people with disabilities has reached historic highs in recent years, a trend researchers attribute in significant part to the expansion of remote and flexible work arrangements and the corresponding reduction in traditional barriers to employment.<sup>14</sup> Among workers with disabilities ages 51 to 64, increased access to occupations that accommodate telework has been linked to a meaningful rise in employment.<sup>15</sup> While accommodations for workers with disabilities are required by law, there are many barriers to accessing such accommodations, and the reality is that many people fall through the cracks.

The benefits of available remote work compound for workers who sit at the intersection of these identities—women of color, disabled caregivers, and others for whom the loss of flexibility does not represent a single burden, but several at once. A telework framework that treats flexibility as the default, not the exception, is one of the most direct tools California has to advance equity in employment across all of these dimensions simultaneously.

## **A Return-to-Office Mandate Will Weaken State Agencies by Driving Out Valuable Employees Who Have Built Their Lives Around the State's Prior Commitment to Remote Work**

Since the pandemic, the State of California has promoted telework as a cornerstone of modern public employment. Workers were hired into positions specifically structured around remote work, and families made consequential decisions—where to live, whether to take a state job over a higher-paying private

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<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Crist, *Black Workers and Workers with Disabilities Are Seeking Flexible Jobs in Record Numbers*, HR DIVE (Feb. 6, 2025), available at <https://www.hrdiver.com/news/black-workers-workers-with-disabilities-flexible-jobs/739422/>.

<sup>10</sup> Danielle Abril, *Return-to-Office Mandates Hurt Diversity, Research Suggests*, WASH. POST (Nov. 14, 2024), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/11/14/return-office-mandates-rto-women-diversity/>.

<sup>11</sup> Sheela Subramanian & Tina Gilbert, *A New Era of Workplace Inclusion: Moving from Retrofit to Redesign*, FUTURE FORUM (Mar. 11, 2021), available at <https://futureforum.com/2021/03/11/dismantling-the-office-moving-from-retrofit-to-redesign/>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Tanya Goldman & Katherine G. Robbins, *Who Works from Home? Remote Work, Gender Equity, and the Access Gap* (Nat'l P'ship for Women & Families, Apr. 2026), available at <https://nationalpartnership.org/report/who-works-from-home-remote-work-gender-equity-access-gap/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Siyan Liu & Laura D. Quinby, *Does Remote Work Help Older People with Disabilities?* (Ctr. for Ret. Research at Bos. Coll., Issue in Brief No. IB 24-19, 2024), available at <https://crr.bc.edu/does-remote-work-help-older-people-with-disabilities/>.

sector offer, how to arrange care for an aging parent or child with a disability, whether a mother could remain in the workforce at all—in reliance on the state’s stated commitment to telework flexibility.

That reliance, in fact, is central to how the state recruits and retains its workforce. Flexible work arrangements are consistently one of the main reasons workers choose public sector jobs over higher-paying private sector positions, allowing agencies to compete for and retain skilled employees without competing on salary alone. Federal agencies have found exactly this dynamic in their own workforces: more than half of new hires at the Social Security Administration (SSA), for example, reported that telework availability was a very important factor in their decision to accept the job.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, almost half of SSA employees who said they were considering leaving the agency said that the availability of offsite work was a factor in making the decision. Unfortunately, but predictably, SSA officials have reported a risk of skills gaps in key occupations that is in part due to attrition by employees seeking greater telework flexibility elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> California’s state agencies will undoubtedly face the same reality if a return-to-office mandate is imposed.

These findings align with what we hear on WorkLife Law’s free legal helpline from the dozens of working caregivers who have called us from around the country, desperate for assistance in the face of a return-to-office mandate. When employers reverse longstanding remote work arrangements, the downstream consequences fall disproportionately on women, mothers, family caregivers, and people caring for loved ones with disabilities. The calls we have already received about the July 1 return-to-office mandate make clear that this proposed policy reversal will force workers to choose between their jobs and their families, and women’s careers will bear the brunt of that impossible choice. The California government should not be a source of calls we receive from workers in crisis.

AB 1729 would protect these workers and their families who have structured their lives around the state’s former commitment to remote work. The bill’s transparency provisions—including the restored statewide dashboard and the requirement that agencies provide written justification before limiting telework—serve a vital equity function. They ensure that decisions to restrict flexibility are based on documented operational need rather than outdated norms that derive from the experiences of decision-makers who are typically white, male, and most financially secure.

AB 1729 is a meaningful, concrete step to preserve the demonstrated gender equity benefits of remote work. WorkLife Law respectfully urges your “AYE” vote on this measure.

Sincerely,

Liz Morris, Co-Director  
WorkLife Law  
UC Law San Francisco

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<sup>16</sup> FEDweek Staff, *Agencies Link Telework Availability to Recruitment, Retention Levels*, FEDWEEK (Jan. 26, 2026), available at <https://www.fedweek.com/federal-managers-daily-report/agencies-link-telework-availability-to-recruitment-retention-levels/>.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*