

## **Testimony on S.94 – Promoting remote work and flexible work arrangements**

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As the largest statewide business organization, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce represents about 1,500 members covering all industries and sectors from tourism to manufacturing, retail to health care, and construction to technology. Our mission is to help our members grow their businesses *and* the Vermont economy. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of this bill.

The advent of cloud computing, technology and broadband has improved the ability of the workforce to work more flexibly. There is a changing face of the workforce, as well as evolution in the ways in which we work, which lends itself well to changing the way in which we accommodate and view our workforce.

Far from being a passing trend, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) represents the future of how work is done and what the workforce of the future expects. Employers here are facing difficulty in attracting talented workers to fill their positions. The Vermont Chamber supports alternative working arrangements to help bolster the pool of available workforce and to help become a state sought out for remote worker job opportunities.

While on our listening tour this fall, we heard from multiple counties about the need to encourage remote worker access and use, co-worker spaces, and encourage more businesses and remote workers here as a hub for these types of FWAs. Employers are desperate for workers all across Vermont and this is a proposal that could help assist employers in recruiting the workforce they may not otherwise be able to obtain outside of that context.

This could also help to attract workers here, while still maintaining their positions in cities such as Boston and New York, as well as assist transition issues faced by many trailing spouses. In that case, this effort can be assisted through the marketing funding that the Vermont Chamber has advocated for and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) has implemented into a marketing plan that they will use to target and attract workers to Vermont.

We are pleased to see that the proposal to market Vermont as a place to live, work, and build a business has been funded for the past two years and we hope to see it funded again this year. In the interim of waiting for workers to move here, this proposal could be especially important in the context of our older workers who we are trying to retain in the workforce longer, but who desire flexibility offered by the FWA while still working. We would like to hear from the ACCD about whether this would dovetail into their work or if there is an alternative to achieve the proposals' results that the ACCD is utilizing that would negate the need for this legislation.

Research has shown that FWAs impact not only recruitment but also retention. They provide numerous social, economic and environmental benefits. FWAs can extend to all segments of the workforce, including semi-retirement and accommodation of leisure interests, family commitments, transportation issues, or multiple jobs.

In the current era of globalization, employees working flexibly across boundaries and borders can have a major business advantage by enabling increased workforce participation from those individuals who may have been prevented from participating in the workforce due to any number of factors. This may also enable those in more rural and remote communities to take up new opportunities throughout Vermont afforded by the potential of working from anywhere.

Remote working can attract and retain top talent, reduce costs, and have environmental benefits. Having a flexible workplace can also provide a wealth of benefits to both the employer and employee. Given Vermont employers' experience with a shortage of talent for a number of jobs, hiring remote workers opens the talent pool. The location of the person is no longer as important, as long as they have a reliable internet connection.

We will note that the Committee should be aware that flexibility is not a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all job benefit and should think about ways to also attract more businesses that offer these types of FWAs to relocate here.

The Vermont Chamber is happy to work with this Committee, working groups, and others in any way that we can. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions that you might have.