



Sent via email only

January 14, 2022

Katy Coba
Chief Operating Officer and DAS Director
Department of Administrative Services
155 Cottage St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Director Coba,

We are writing to bring to your attention concerning circumstances our members are facing with the latest surge in COVID cases, and we are requesting immediate action to protect workers at State Agencies throughout Oregon. As you know, over the past weeks there have been record-breaking COVID-19 daily case counts. As the Governor recognized when she extended the state of emergency, and you recognized when you extended the remote work guidance for agencies, Omicron is posing unique and extreme challenges when it comes to the safety of state workers and members of the public seeking services.

We recognize the extreme pressure that you and other state leaders are under to balance health and safety and a need to provide essential services to Oregonians. Our requests are outlined in detail below, but broadly we are asking for a renewed dedication to allowing remote work whenever possible and flexibility and understanding for parents dealing with intermittent school closures or quarantine periods. We understand the Omicron surge should ebb soon, but in the meantime our members are struggling in so many ways, and more support and understanding from state agencies would go a long way in everyone getting through this phase of the COVID crisis.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these recommendations and our members' experiences at your earliest convenience.

Health & Safety Requests

- Temporarily suspend most if not all in-person services at non-essential State Agencies. Require all other in-person services to be by appointment only, and enforce all COVID-19 safety requirements including: requiring masks, installing protective barriers around desks and welcome areas, and maintaining six feet of social distance.
- Acquire and distribute sufficient Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for all state workers who are required to report in person to work. Ideally, masks rated KN95 or higher, especially when employees are required to be within less than six feet of other people during their shift.

- Staffing challenges at 24-hour facilities, particularly the Oregon State Hospital, are causing burnout and increased health and safety risks. We ask that this issue be treated with the urgency it demands and any staffing resources or incentives at the State's disposal be utilized.
- Halt the increasingly common practice of returning more and more employees to the office for in-person work. This is unnecessary and dangerous during this current surge, and we think it contradicts the guidance you have given agencies around remote work.
- Allow employees who have tested positive, but are asymptomatic, or who are quarantining due to an exposure to remote work if they can. Employees trying to do the right thing and keep COVID from spreading should not face unnecessary financial hardship.
- Employees who are unable to work (in person or remotely) due to school closures or required quarantine for children in their household should have access to donated hardship leave, if needed, we ask that we sign a Letter of Agreement to ensure this right for parents until the state of emergency is over.
- All employees who are working in-person while the state of emergency is in effect should receive the \$1/hour essential worker differential that we bargained in the most recent negotiations. Offices across the state range from fully open to completely closed with all employees working remotely and no access for the public. We feel the essential worker differential is the appropriate way to recognize the increased risk to employees working in person, and therefore at greater risk of contracting COVID.

We thank you for your consideration of our requests, and for your continued leadership during this incredibly difficult time.

Sincerely,



Mike Powers
President, SEIU Local 503, OPEU



Executive Director, SEIU Local 503, OPEU

cc: Governor Kate Brown