

# DeWine signs executive order requiring state employees to return to regular in-person work

*The Return to Office for State of Ohio Employees order requires workers to be in person by March 17*

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**Columbus Dispatch**

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine signed an executive order Tuesday requiring some state employees to return to regular in-office work, with a few exceptions.

The order does not specify if employees will be required to work five days a week, but instead says permanent employees must routinely perform their duties from a physical office or facility assigned by their employer. The Return to Office for State of Ohio Employees order requires workers to be in person by March 17.

"It is now in the best interest of the citizens of Ohio for State of Ohio employees to complete a return to a physical office or facility to best serve the public and maximize the use of state-owned assets and facilities," the order states.

The order impacts agencies, boards and commissions under DeWine's authority.

The Tuesday order comes after some of the largest private employers in Ohio have mandated their workers to return to work.

The order allows the Department of Administrative Services to make exceptions if in-person work is not possible including if a state agency has eliminated all or a portion of its office space.

The COVID pandemic in 2020 forced the state to allow many workers to work from home.

The executive order notes that the state has saved millions of dollars from reducing the office space it owns. The order also says that the majority of state employees "never worked remotely due to the nature of their positions."

President Donald Trump signed an executive order requiring federal remote workers to return to office on Jan. 20.

In June, 2023, the Ohio Senate proposed returning state workers for four days a week including it in its budget proposal, which did not make it to the final version.

President and CEO of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce Derrick Clay said in a news release the executive order was a "positive step forward for the economic vitality of the Columbus region and the broader business community."

The increased foot traffic from state workers will improve vibrancy of the downtown region and support small businesses, he noted in the release.

Telework was included in the agreement between the state of Ohio and the Ohio Civil Service Employee Association, the largest union representing state workers. It states employees may request a remote or hybrid schedule and denials must include a reason in writing to the employee and OCSEA. It also states that any termination of an existing remote or hybrid schedules requires a detailed reason in writing for that termination in advance.

OCSEA president Chris Mabe said in a statement the union is reviewing how the executive order will impact its collective bargaining agreement and noted some benefits to telework. He said remote work has allowed the state to attract and retain top talent, and has saved taxpayers money for expenses on office space and maintenance.

"[Telework] has enabled state employees to live and work in every part of Ohio without the need to move to Columbus or have long commutes," he said in the statement. "A remote workforce can also maintain essential services without interruption during natural disasters or other emergencies. The consequences of this executive order should be fully considered."

## **How many Ohio state employees work remotely?**

J.C. Benton, spokesperson for DAS, said this order will apply to approximately 44,000 state workers. The percentage of workers who work remote or hybrid schedules depends on the agency.

He said about 65% of state employees are currently working full time in-office and were never given the opportunity to work remote because of the nature of their jobs. About 25% of state workers are hybrid and 10% are fully remote, most of which work in customer service and call-center roles, Benton said.