

The Work Week

Bassford Remele Employment Practice Group



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Welcome to another edition of *The Work Week with Bassford Remele*. Each Monday morning, we will publish and send a new article to your inbox to hopefully assist you in jumpstarting your work week.

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Major Corporations Reimpose Office Mandates as Tensions Grow Between Governor and Labor Unions

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Major Minnesota Corporations Institute Return to Work Policies

Minnesota corporations such as Target and Medtronic have recently implemented return-to-work strategies that require employees to work in-office in an increased capacity.

Medtronic has announced an increase in its in-office work requirement for hybrid employees in the United States to at least four days per week, effective September 2—an increase from the company's previous hybrid policy of in-person workdays three days per week. The policy change will initially apply to seven U.S. sites, including operational headquarters in Fridley and locations in Mounds View and Rice Creek. Medtronic has emphasized that this decision aims to reinvest in a culture of community and connection by prioritizing in-person interactions, which are deemed invaluable to their work. Medtronic's spokesperson noted that while virtual and hybrid environments have been successful, the nature of their business thrives on collaborative, spontaneous interactions. The company will continue to evaluate work styles based on evolving business needs and consistency within local communities near Medtronic sites.

Similarly, Target has been implementing return-to-office requirements for various headquarters employees in downtown Minneapolis, though without a companywide mandate. Multiple divisions have notified employees that they will be expected to work at the office, with the number of required in-office days varying by work group. Some groups have already begun their in-office schedules, while others are expected to start later this month or by September at the latest. Target's corporate policy remains unchanged, allowing individual leaders to make decisions for their teams based on company guidance and the specific needs of their roles.

Both Medtronic and Target's policies align with a broader trend among Minnesota corporations, such as 3M, dialing back their work-from-home policies. These moves also coincide with Governor Walz's state telework policy requiring state employees to return to the office for at least 50% of their scheduled workdays. The aggregated emphasis on in-person work reflects a concerted belief by these major corporations that face-to-face interactions foster collaboration and operational efficiency, while the growing public belief focuses on the dynamics of downtown real estate markets, including the costs associated with maintaining office spaces.

Tensions Rise Between Governor and Unions Amid Contract Talks

In related news, tensions have emerged between Governor Tim Walz and Minnesota's public sector unions, particularly the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE), regarding recent administrative decisions affecting state workers.

In March of this year, Governor Walz addressed forthcoming contract negotiations with labor unions and highlighted his optimism in restoring their historically strong relationship while emphasizing a collaborative process founded in mutual respect. However, in the subsequent three months, union members have expressed discontent in negotiations. The state proposed significant increases in health-care costs for many state workers, and some employees are facing impending layoff notices due to the current budget impasse at the Capitol. Compounding these issues was Governor Walz's late-March directive requiring state workers to return to the office at least part-time. Unions had hoped to address the return-to-office policy during contract negotiations, and the Governor's alleged preemption of a previously represented collaborative process has left labor unions frustrated.

Governor Walz has defended the return-to-office mandate as a reasonable compromise aimed at strengthening workplace culture through increased collaboration and mentorship opportunities. The policy, which officially took effect on June 1, allows agency employees to telework up to half (50%) their workdays if their performance is satisfactory and agency needs are met.

The rift between the Governor and public employee unions remains significant. Contract negotiations between MAPE, AFSCME, and the State continue to move forward with the goal of reaching an agreement before current contracts expire at the end of June. Despite the historically strong relationship between the Governor and unions, the present tensions serve to highlight the foundational role that mutual trust and cooperative engagement play in the maintenance of effective labor relations.

At Bassford Remele, we actively track emerging and upcoming legislative developments in employment law, with particular attention to workplace policy shifts influenced by recent state and federal regulatory changes. Feel free to reach out if you need assistance in this continually evolving landscape!

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