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POLICY BRIEFING SERIES

WORK-FAMILY INFORMATION FOR STATE LEGISLATORS

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FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES

One Way To Help American Families Better Balance Their Work And Family Lives

Challenged by the regular juggle of work and family lives, the majority of American workers have recently reported that they do not have enough time to attend to their family and personal lives,¹ and nearly a third of American workers consider work-life balance and flexibility to be the most important factor in considering job offers.² With only a minority of today's families able to afford a full-time stay-at-home parent or other caregiver to attend to the needs of children and other dependents, employees and employers are exploring the use of flexible work schedules to help working families better balance their work and family lives.

WHAT ARE FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES?

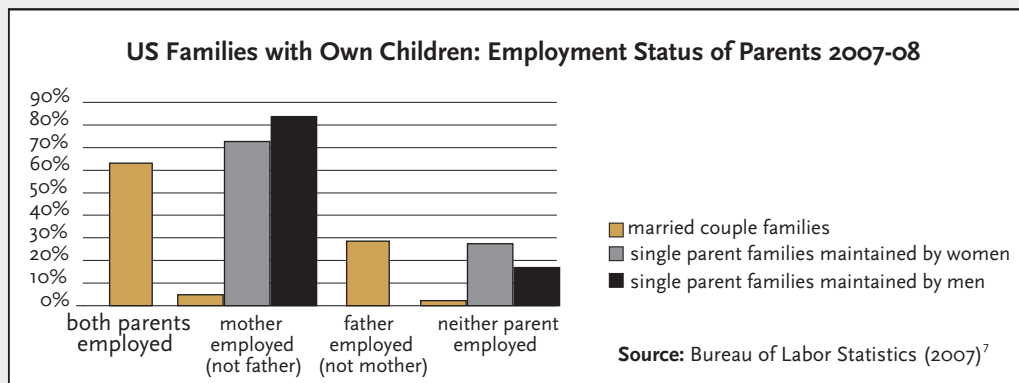
A flexible work schedule is a type of work arrangement that allows employees to vary when they begin and end their workday to accommodate their individual and family needs instead of working a traditional Monday–Friday, 40+-hour workweek. Sometimes called “flexitime” or “flexitime,” this arrangement focuses exclusively on the work schedule rather than on the location of work (telework) or other factors. Variations include daily and traditional flexitime and compressed workweeks (e.g., working four 10-hour days).³

WHY ARE FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES BEING DEVELOPED AND ADOPTED?

In 2009, the American workforce is vastly different than it was in previous generations, and these changes have affected how working families attend to their work and domestic spheres. While for decades, most families were composed of a breadwinner father, who worked at least 9-to-5 outside the home, and a stay-at-home mother who attended to the needs of her family and home for no pay, this paradigm is greatly outdated today.⁴ Recent workforce changes affecting work-family balance include:

Increased Labor Force Participation of Caregivers:

- Today, most mothers work outside the domestic sphere, resulting in 70% of American families with children having all adults in the labor force.⁴
- Moreover, 25% of all workers have elder-care responsibilities, and this number is expected to rise as the elderly population increases due to advances in science and medicine.⁵
- A 2003 study of Fortune 500 company employees providing elder care showed that 78% of male respondents and 84% of female respondents came late to work or left early from work to accommodate their elder caregiving responsibilities.⁶



Longer Work Hours: Over the past quarter century, the average combined weekly hours of dual-earner couples with children have increased from 81 to 91 hours.⁴ With more time spent at work, there is consequently less time to attend to family needs.

Mismatched Schedules: Longer work hours are frequently at odds with the daily schedules of other family members. This mismatch makes it difficult for many to take elderly relatives to medical appointments or find before- or after-school care that meets their scheduling needs.

WHY ARE FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES A POLICY MATTER?

- Employers might be more likely to adopt policies on flexible schedules if state laws rewarded them in some way for these policies.
- State laws can protect employees who have concerns that they might be penalized for requesting flexible schedules.
- State legislators can support bills that would increase flexible work schedules for public-sector employees.

WHO HAS ACCESS TO FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES?

Many employers are providing some of their employees with flexible work schedules, though there are disparities in access among different groups of employees.

In fact, 79% of organizations allow some employees to periodically change starting or quitting times, while 38% of organizations allow some employees to work a compressed workweek.⁸

However, employees with less than a high school diploma are significantly less likely to have control over the hours they work compared with college-educated workers.⁹ In addition, black and Hispanic workers are less likely to have access to flexible work schedules than white and Asian workers.⁹

Still, many employees hesitate to use flexible schedules even if they are available at work.

- In a 2009 survey, respondents indicated different reasons they did not use workplace flexibility programs, like flexible work schedules, even when they were offered. Nineteen percent of respondents indicated they did not use workplace flexibility because it might hurt their career, 22% indicated it might cost them their job, and 16% reasoned that it would cause others to think “they don’t work hard.”¹⁰

HOW DOES THE AVAILABILITY OF FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES AFFECT WORKING FAMILIES?

Having access to flexible work schedules can make a positive difference in the well-being of employees and their families.

- The National Study of the Changing Workforce found that employees who have greater access to flexible schedules report fewer mental health problems and are more committed to their organizations and more engaged on the job.⁸
- A recent study on low-income workers found that for hourly workers, stress and burnout is more than two times greater for employees who do not have the flexibility they need.¹¹

Research consistently confirms that employees’ work and family lives would be a lot easier if their work schedules were more flexible. For instance:

- Over two-fifths (41%) of full-time workers in one study agreed that if they were given more control over their time, they would be more productive.¹²
- Fifty percent of employees who have high access to flexible work arrangements on the job report high levels of life satisfaction.¹³

HOW DO FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES AFFECT BUSINESS?

Employers who offer flexible work schedules often find that there are business benefits.

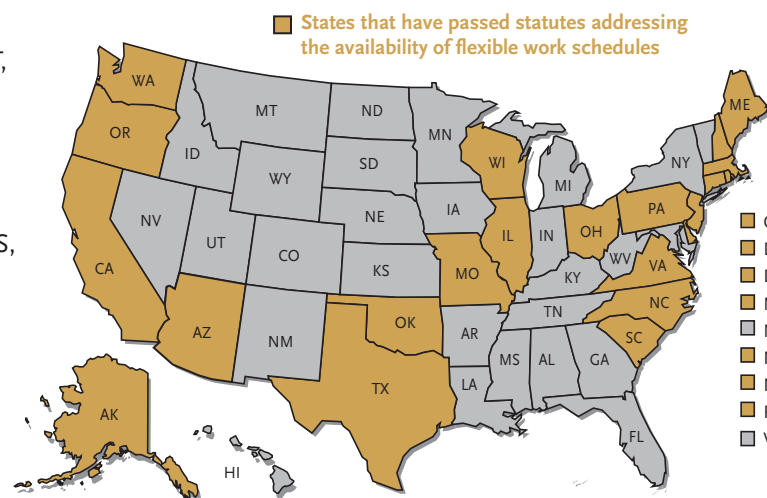
- Businesses providing flexible schedules may benefit from enhanced recruitment and retention, decreased health-care costs, and increased shareholder return.¹⁴
- Flexible work schedules may enhance an employer’s ability to successfully employ a more diverse workforce, including younger and older workers, men and women, and workers with disabilities.³
- During economic “hard times,” some businesses utilize flexible work schedules and other workplace flexibility programs to minimize the need for layoffs.¹⁵
 - A national report indicated that 81% of employers are maintaining workplace flexibility programs, while 13% are increasing the use of these programs during the 2007–2009 recession.¹⁵

Employers’ concerns about such schedules include the potential for a negative impact on work quality and productivity; difficulty ensuring proper office coverage, especially during peak hours; and the administrative burdens associated with tracking flexible schedules.¹⁶

WHAT LEGISLATION HAVE STATES CONSIDERED CONCERNING FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES?

Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia have passed statutes that address the availability of flexible work schedules (AK, AZ, CA, CT, DC, DE, FL, IL, MA, ME, MO, NC, NH, NJ, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TX, VA, WA, WI).

In addition, 12 states have introduced bills concerning flexible work schedules during the 2009–2010 legislative session, including bills related to: (a) flexible work arrangements for state employees (DE, MS, OK, OR, VA), (b) amending overtime rules to accommodate flexible work arrangements (CA, NH, KS), (c) providing a tax credit to employers allowing flexible scheduling (MD, VA), (d) requiring state agencies/officials to provide a status report on the flexible work schedules that are currently in use (NY, VA), and (e) reducing traffic congestion and aiding the environment (CT, GA).



For more information on bills and statutes related to flexible work schedules, visit:

http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/template.php?name=bill_clusters and http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/template.php?name=statutes_by_theme

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

- Workplace Flexibility 2010—<http://www.law.georgetown.edu/workplaceflexibility2010/definition/fwa.cfm>
“Workplace Flexibility 2010 is a research, outreach and consensus-building enterprise located at Georgetown University Law Center.”
- Families and Work Institute—<http://www.familiesandwork.org/>
Families and Work Institute (FWI) is a nonprofit research organization focused on enhancing the work-life movement through cutting-edge research on the changing workforce, family, and community.
- Corporate Voices for Working Families—<http://www.corporatevoices.org/>
Corporate Voices for Working Families is the leading national business membership organization representing the private sector on public and corporate policy issues involving working families and conducts research on many policy areas, including workplace flexibility.

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The Sloan Work and Family Research Network can provide you with additional research-based information about working families.

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