

Highlights from October 23, 2009 Congressional Briefing *Our Stories: Your Constituents*

On October 23, 2009, a diverse range of organizations including employer associations, employee representatives, and consumer and professional organizations jointly sponsored a briefing at the United States Capitol Visitors' Center.

This group of diverse stakeholders agreed that FWAs are key to meeting the varied needs of the 21st century workforce and their employers. During the briefing, each organization explained how flexible work arrangements (FWAs) meet the needs of their members or the issues they represent.

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) alter the time and/or place that work is conducted on a regular basis — in a manner that is as manageable and predictable as possible for both employees and employers. FWAs provide:

Flexibility in the scheduling of hours worked, such as alternative work schedules (e.g., non-traditional start and end times, flex time, or compressed workweeks) and arrangements regarding overtime, predictable scheduling, and shift and break schedules;

Flexibility in the amount of hours worked, such as part time work, job shares, phased retirement or part year work; and

Flexibility in the place of work, such as working at home, at a satellite location or at different locations.

The American Association for People with Disabilities identified FWAs as key to successful employment for many people with disabilities: “People with disabilities and their family members often face great challenges in balancing work and personal commitments. The flexibility to work part time, to shift hours, and to work from home can be critical to successful employment for these workers.

People with disabilities may be entitled to scheduling modifications and changes in the place of work as reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. But very often, it works better for both the employee and the employer to create an open and flexible work environment that will enable all

employees to balance work and personal needs.” Robin Shaffert, Director, Corporate Social Responsibility.

AARP’s Public Policy Institute discussed the importance of FWAs to older workers: “Nearly half of AARP’s approximately 40 million members are in the labor force. Many of our members have children at home. Increasing numbers of middle-aged workers are providing care to elderly parents, many of them living some distance away.

Our working members need workplace flexibility for the same reasons the working constituents of other organizations do—to help them better juggle the responsibilities of paid work and family life in ways that meet the needs of their employers, their families, and themselves.

One type of flexible work arrangement that is of great interest to our members is phased or partial retirement, particularly the still rare formal phased retirement program that enables workers to scale back working hours with their current employer.” Sara Rix, Strategic Policy Advisor.

The **American Psychological Association** explained that flexible work arrangements are often key to improvements in health and well-being. The APA has a long history of work on workplace policies that address the recent demographic shifts in our workforce, and the corresponding stress facing families today.

Research shows that employees with FWAs report less stress and better health and that there are consequent benefits for their employers. Through APA’s longstanding partnership with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, APA continues to explore workplace interventions including work-family and work redesign programs that will decrease stress, illness and injury. Making flexible work arrangements more widely available is key to improving employees’ health and well-being. Gwendolyn Keita, Executive Director for Public Interest.

Corporate Voices for Working Families explained why flexible work arrangements are a key to business success: “Our 50 partner companies understand that flexible work arrangements, for both salaried and hourly employees, contribute to more productive work environments, increased employee loyalty, reduced stress, and as a result, increased profitability and global competitiveness.

Our recently released report, *Innovative Workplace Flexibility Options for Hourly Workers*, shows that workplace flexibility works as well or better for hourly workers as it does for professional workers.

The business community can and should be challenged to encourage their peers to adopt workplace flexibility programs as an integral part of the way work is done and how people are managed. For this effort to succeed it must directly engage

businesses and business groups, government agencies, academics and policy makers.” Ellen Goldstein, Senior Advisor to the President.

Family Values at Work Consortium addressed working families’, and particularly low-wage workers’ needs for flexible work arrangements: “Our consortium includes 14 state coalitions, and together these groups represent thousands of working families, in particular low-wage workers. Women make up a disproportionate share of low-wage workers - for them flexibility is not a just a ‘balance’ issue, but an issue of basic family security.”

The Consortium discussed the myriad scheduling challenges working families face: mandatory overtime; lack of flexibility to attend school or medical appointments; lack of control or predictability over work schedules (e.g., getting notice of weekly work hours on a Friday for a workweek beginning on Monday); punishment for minor lateness or absence infractions; insufficient hours; and penalties for part-time workers, concluding: “Flexibility is key – but flexibility must benefit employees as well as employers.” Sarah Standiford, Executive Director, Maine Women’s Lobby.

Legal Momentum described the urgent need that many survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence have for flexible work arrangements. For survivors of domestic violence, holding down a job may be critical to their ability to end a violent relationship. Flexible work arrangements, in turn, may be critical to survivors’ ability to hold down a job. For example, employees may need flexible scheduling so that they can schedule time to pursue legal remedies, such as orders of protection, or to pursue medical treatment or counseling. Because many abusers may contact or threaten their victims in the workplace, flexible work arrangements such as altering start and end times, telecommuting, or changing shifts may be key to safety. For employers, keeping these employees safe helps prevent violence in the workplace and maintain a stable and productive workforce. “These solutions are typically simple and not costly to employers and are life-saving to employees.” Lisalyn Jacobs, VP of Government Relations.

The **National Military Family Association** discussed the importance of flexible work arrangements to employees caring for returning service members and spouses who must function as single parents during deployment of the service member spouse: “Frequent deployments and high operational tempo are taking their toll on the mental health and well-being of military caregivers and children. Research has shown that employment enhances civilian women’s well-being. Military spouses and caregivers are no different and our research is showing similar results.” For these reasons flexible work arrangements can play a critical role in easing some of the strain on military service members and their families. Kelly Hruska, Deputy Director, Government Relations.

The **National Partnership for Women & Families** highlighted the importance of flexible work arrangements to today's working families: "The National Partnership strongly supports efforts that are responsive to workers' needs for more flexibility in the workplace. The majority of children now live in a home where all adult caregivers are working. Today, people are living longer with chronic conditions. Together, this means that Americans are working outside of the home while having responsibilities for 3 generations --their kids, their parents, and themselves and their spouses. Workers need flexibility that they control in their jobs to care for family members and to be responsible parents. Women are the only breadwinner in 4 out of 10 families and the co-breadwinner in over 2/3 of families. Families simply can't afford for women to not work—but they also need time for caregiving." Sharyn Tejani, Senior Policy Counsel.

The **Society for Human Resource Management** explained why flexible work arrangements are important in the modern workplace: "The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and its 250,000 members believe that development of a 21st Century workplace flexibility public policy that works for both employers and employees, is a critically important issue, and that voluntary flexible work arrangements are a key component of that modern workplace policy.

Human resource professionals understand that the "traditional" workplace with a nine-to-five schedule is fast becoming a thing of the past with technological advances, dual-income households, and an increase in the number of employees with caregiving responsibilities, all driving increased demand for flexible work arrangements. SHRM believes voluntary FWAs can be part of the solution to these workplace challenges." Mike Aitken, Director of Government Affairs.

The **United States Chamber of Commerce** discussed the role of flexible work arrangements in helping business innovate: "Employers grappling with a shrinking labor force and a growing demand for skilled workers need to consider innovative strategies and resources when developing recruitment and retention policies. Workplace flexibility can be a powerful tool in recruiting, retaining and advancing qualified employees while enhancing businesses' competitiveness in a global economy.

Through the Chamber's Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), we are working in partnership with the Families and Work Institute and the Twiga Foundation to conduct a nationwide education and recognition initiative, designed to promote the practices of the most effective and flexible workplaces. This initiative, known as *When Work Works*, highlights business practices that are meeting the needs of both employers and employees through the Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility." Marc Freedman, Executive Director of Labor Law Policy.

WorldatWork discussed the business case for flexible work arrangements: “Increasingly robust research has shown that investment in workplace flexibility yields a positive return on investment. When professionally implemented, managed and communicated, work-life programs have been shown to reduce stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction. At the same time, they create work environments that are associated with enhanced business outcomes, such as increased levels of workforce attraction, retention, engagement and productivity. Another important aspect of work-life programs is that they also reduce absenteeism and healthcare costs in a variety of ways— 2 of the biggest HR cost factors organizations face today. This year the Congress has declared that October is National Work and Family Month. We are grateful for the support that our lead co-sponsors have shown for workplace flexibility and the greater issues of work-family: Representative McCarthy, Representative Platts, Senator Lincoln and Senator Crapo.” Cara Welch, Director, Public Policy.

Workplace Flexibility 2010 concluded: “There are important demographic changes affecting our workforce today: women make up half of our workforce; our aging population wants and needs to work longer; our fastest growing sector, the service sector, employs our greatest number of low-wage, hourly workers; people with disabilities want to be better integrated in employment; and things happen in people’s lives – everything from military deployments to domestic violence – that shape their daily needs.

Although many employers recognize these changes and offer FWAs in response (including both flexibility and predictability), many others do not. We think this needs to change. As we heard from the speakers today, when done correctly, FWAs can have a significant positive impact on: first, the operation of the businesses themselves; and second, on the mental and physical health of the workers; on the social health of families, and on the public health of communities.” Chai Feldblum, Co-Director.