



STATE OF WISCONSIN  
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

Tony Evers, Governor  
Kathy Blumenfeld, Secretary

---

**Wisconsin Department of Administration March 19, 2024 Testimony on the Legislative Audit Bureau's Report 23-22 on Telework, Space Management, and Risk Management**

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs Wimberger and Wittke, and Committee Members.

My name is Kathy Blumenfeld, I serve as the Secretary of the Department of Administration, and I am pleased to be here before you today. Seated next to me are Paul Hammer, DOA's Deputy Secretary, Jen Fogel, our Division of Personnel Management Administrator, Trina Zanow, the State's Chief Information Officer, and Sanjay Olson, our Division of Facilities and Transportation Services Administrator.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the Legislative Audit Bureau's Report 23-22 on Telework, Space Management, and Risk Management. I would like to thank the Audit Bureau for their work on this audit; it was a tremendous undertaking. The state enterprise is large and complex with over 30,000 employees and dozens of agencies. Each agency is unique, as are the divisions and work units within each agency. The differences in agency missions, structure, customer needs, and service delivery methods vary greatly across the enterprise. As such, the remote work options and space needs vary as well.

In addition to the breadth and complexity of the enterprise's scope, many of the policies and realities the audit addressed are new, fluctuating, and born out of less-than-ideal circumstances. The major shift to remote or hybrid work for state agencies did not happen in a vacuum; they were initiated and necessitated by the COVID pandemic. In the immediate onset of the pandemic, agencies, in a matter of days, stood up systems to facilitate remote work to keep employees and the public safe and continue providing critical services to Wisconsinites across the state. During the early months of the pandemic, it was often uncertain when employees working remotely would be able to safely return to the office. And so, agencies began to adapt and refine their "emergency" remote work policies and procedures.

As the pandemic wore on, many workplaces and industries across sectors - including the private sector - identified that remote work offered significant benefits to help retain and recruit workers in a challenging and competitive labor market. Remote work became an important and widely implemented practice by employers nationwide and around the world.

As the state's largest employer, the State of Wisconsin continues to strive to compete with public and private counterparts alike. To that end, agencies are focused on a future in which some level of remote work continues to be the norm. Many agencies have adopted an "anywhere in Wisconsin" approach to hiring, enabling the State of Wisconsin's workforce to reflect the people and the makeup of our state. This has allowed for recruitment of candidates from outside of the state's tight labor markets, such as Madison and Milwaukee, to continue improving the geographic diversity of the state's workforce.

When I was serving as the Secretary of the Department of Financial Institutions, we had a number of failed recruitments for our Banking and Credit Union Supervisors. Once we opened the recruitment to anywhere in Wisconsin, we received more applications from qualified candidates and were able to hire talented individuals to fill our vacancies.

At the Department of Revenue, Auditors and Agents were previously only hired to work out of specific offices when a vacancy arose at that office. With remote work options, DOR can hire Auditors and Agents anywhere in Wisconsin and out of any office. Vacancy rates for Agents have decreased dramatically and Auditor vacancies have been reduced as well.

Across the enterprise, we're continuing to develop effective and efficient remote work models that support organizational resilience and flexibility in a rapidly changing world and workforce. Much like employers across the country and around the world, our state agencies are improving as we go. We're continuing to implement best practices and develop tools to collect and assess data to effectively utilize remote work while improving service for Wisconsinites and our employees.

Remote work best practices also continue to evolve, for example, moving from a coverage to a collaboration model. As public and private sectors continue adjusting to market realities, best practices will continue to shift. Often what works well in one industry is not equally suited to another; and similarly, what may work well for one state agency may not work well for another.

I am proud that despite the challenges, compounded by a global workforce crisis, our state agencies have been able to utilize remote work to keep employees engaged, while continuing to provide the services that Wisconsinites rely on and deserve.

We have been and will continue to develop remote work, space use, and IT policies and procedures that help us build for the future. As I shared in my March 1 letter, DOA agrees with the Audit Bureau's recommendations made in this report, and work is well underway to implement those recommendations as a part of our continuous improvement process.

Ultimately, like so many other employers across all sectors, we're moving towards a new operating model, evolving entrenched ways of doing things that no longer serve the needs of our workforce and operations; turning a big ship takes time. As we noted in our response, the data collected and used by LAB to develop its recommendations was not always the most relevant or reliable to demonstrate exactly how people are working. That said, DOA is drawing on these recommendations to develop new tools to gather data, and is reviewing standards, policies, and procedures that have been used for decades, and refreshing them to align with the current needs of the enterprise.

The audit identified a number of areas that we and many employers need to address to optimize our use of remote and hybrid work. The new tools we're developing will allow agencies to better track remote work across their workforce, ensure that remote work agreements are up-to-date, and assemble accurate data on where employees are headquartered. This new information will be key in helping agencies optimize and manage space needs, from an individual cubicle to an entire building, and inform our ongoing space consolidation efforts under Vision 2030.

In addition, we need to be sure our supervisors have the tools and training to manage staff in this new normal. We also need to refine how we build culture and teamwork, especially with new staff.

That said, it is clear that remote and hybrid work will result in several benefits for the state, including:

- Helping agencies continue to be an employer of choice in this competitive labor market,
- Reducing the real-estate footprint of state government, which saves taxpayer dollars and returns properties to the tax rolls, and
- Allowing agencies to provide good paying state jobs across the state.

I am confident that these improvements will result in a win-win scenario for our state. Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I welcome your questions and dialogue on this important topic.



**Office of the President**

1720 Van Hise Hall, 1220 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706

[www.wisconsin.edu](http://www.wisconsin.edu)

[jrothman@uwsa.edu](mailto:jrothman@uwsa.edu) or 608-262-2321

DATE: March 19, 2024

TO: Members of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee

FROM: Jay Rothman, President

RE: Testimony on Universities of Wisconsin's Telework, Space Management, and Risk Management Audit Report

Good afternoon, Chair Wimberger, Chair Wittke, and the other committee members. Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to discuss the Universities of Wisconsin's (UWs) telework audit report. I appreciate your engagement on this issue.

At the Universities of Wisconsin, our primary purpose is to serve Wisconsinites. We are a student-focused organization and are striving every single day to ensure the success of our more than 162,000 students across our 13 universities.

One of the first things I did when I took this job in June of 2022 was work – in consultation with the Board of Regents and numerous stakeholders – to develop a five-year strategic plan for the Universities of Wisconsin. As part of that plan, we outlined the purpose, core values, and strategic objectives for the Universities of Wisconsin to strive for in the period from 2023-28.

First, purpose. Our purpose is "... [to] deliver transformative educational outcomes and research that expands the boundaries of knowledge. We will work to extend the value of our universities beyond the boundaries of the campuses, seeking to enhance the quality of life for all in Wisconsin and beyond, in fulfillment of the Wisconsin Idea."

Second, core values. The Universities of Wisconsin core values are as follows: 1) we are purpose-driven, 2) we are people-focused, and 3) we have a commitment to stewardship.

Third, strategic objectives. We have outlined four strategic objectives for the Universities of Wisconsin to continue striving for through 2028.

- Enhancing the student experience and social mobility
- Fostering civic engagement and serving the public good
- Creating and disseminating knowledge that contributes to innovation and a better understanding of the human condition
- Advancing economic prosperity

We consider not only all of these important ideas, but also the success of our students in everything we do at the Universities of Wisconsin. This includes when deciding where telework may be appropriate. I strongly believe that working in a traditional office on campus is the preferred route to ensure student success and best serve the state of Wisconsin.

*(continued)*

However, we do live in a constantly changing marketplace, and as one of the largest talent generators for the state of Wisconsin, we must adapt to reflect marketplace conditions. Traditionally, one way we have done this is through implementing new degree programs, investing more resources in high-demand areas, and modifying older degree programs.

Recently, and largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also had to adapt to reflect the telework flexibility desired by much of the current workforce. During the pandemic, remote work became essential to ensure our campuses continued running. Since the return to in-person work, many of our employees have returned to campus. But, to remain competitive in a labor market where teleworking has become the new normal, we have had to modernize our remote work policies, including allowing for hybrid work and, in some cases, totally remote work. The Universities of Wisconsin have worked hard to ensure our campuses are able to adapt to this new era of telework, without negating the success of our students or our strategic goals, purpose, and culture.

I want to thank the Legislature and the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) for partnering with the Universities of Wisconsin and searching for areas where we can improve our campuses' efficiency and effectiveness. We are in uncharted waters to a great extent as it relates to remote work. And I appreciate that we can always get better consistent with our focus on continuous improvement. I believe the LAB's findings will help us move in that direction. The audit identified areas the following areas that need to be improved and strengthened: telework policies, telework policy compliance and information gathering, travel reimbursements, space management, and IT risk management. We are in the process of updating our HR systems and policies, and these changes will address the concerns outlined by the LAB.

I want to conclude today by saying the Universities of Wisconsin take the LAB's findings seriously, and that is why we continue to make improvements based on the recommendations outlined in the report. Telework has expanded significantly across Wisconsin and our country in the last few years. As the labor force continues to adapt to this change, the Universities of Wisconsin will continue to strike a balance between remaining competitive and allowing our employees flexibility, while still ensuring the success of our students and adherence to our strategic goals. I do believe that a traditional, on-campus work environment is always the preferred route, but I also recognize we are living in a world that is constantly changing.

Thank you again for allowing me to provide testimony today.