

Commissioner's Listening Session with employees affected by office closures

Management Present: Robert Doty, Elizabeth Blomberg

MAPE Present: Nic Frey, Kristine Moody, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], Ann Adkisson, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] – 17 ½ years sales tax in Duluth. Moved to Duluth, likes the small town atmosphere, where her and husband wanted to raise a family. Didn't like MOU but couldn't afford to be laid off. Can't report to work in St. Paul, too arduous and stressful to go back and forth, dangerous trip in winter.

[REDACTED] – 14 years, Duluth audit. Office closure has been stressful, we felt bullied into agreeing to MOU through threat of layoff. Personally suffering from stress/fear of the situation and this is affecting physical and mental wellbeing. Living in greater MN is different from living in metro, different power outages, weather, opportunities/amenities, etc. Feels by being classified as a St. Paul employee attacks her identity as an outstate Minnesotan. People, taxpayers and coworkers alike, value a human connection regardless of technology. MOU has taken her sense of security, worried about receiving an email ordering her to report to St. Paul for work. Requests for unique telework policy for those without physical office within reasonable distance. Asking to be treated equitably.

[REDACTED] – 9 years, Duluth auditor. Enjoys the work she does and the people she works with. She wants to retire with the state, appreciates sense of position and stability as a state employee in Duluth. Was saddened to hear office was closing. Was shocked to read about budget surplus during MOU process, closing office seemed unnecessary in hindsight. Was intimidated to vote yes on the MOU through threat of layoff. Plans to continue working for state but asks commissioner to designate home office as permanent location and provide resources necessary to support workers.

[REDACTED] – 4 years. MOU process didn't feel like a negotiation, given choice between layoffs or having permanent office as St. Paul. Haven't receiving anything in writing that they won't have to pay expenses for traveling to St. Paul for training or guarantees that telework policies won't be pulled. Office equipment and supplies, many taxpayers don't use email, have scanners, or are internet savvy. How are we supposed to go out into field without this equipment? How are we supposed to scan important documents into e-folders? Asks that management follow through that they engage in good faith supplemental bargaining to put guarantees into writing and to consider requests for equipment.

[REDACTED] - Sales tax for 5 years, worked in Brainerd. Has been happy with time at revenue. The MOU process seemed drastic and extreme. Management and HR seemed oblivious to what was occurring, everything seemed punted to MMB and they were calling all the shots, essentially just presented an ultimatum. Trust in management has been eroded and morale has plummeted. Worries that management will make people report to St. Paul. Not tenable to get people to report to St. Paul from outstate. Auditing our region from St. Paul isn't feasible, can't audit remotely from St. Paul, need to inspect physical records regularly. Would like to be treated like other remote workers, would like home offices to be treated as permanent location. Would like to be provided with the basics for running a home office like a desk, shredder, printer/scanner, etc.

█ – Worked with Revenue 27.5 years, leadworker in Duluth office for salestax. Was very shocked when this happened. Has been through many things at Revenue but never a situation where there was a threat of losing her job. Voted no on the MOU, didn't care to be threatened with losing her job. Their office was very close, they all very much enjoy working together and didn't want to have the office close. Want the equipment to do their jobs and the security of having outstate as their permanent office locations.

Doty – My intention was to listen and really hear and understand the concerns of our employees. Has been taking notes and wants to go back and unpack some of it. I'm a big proponent of increasing and enhancing the employee experience at Revenue, particularly in relation to efforts around equity. I am concerned about some of the things I've heard regarding that experience with employees. Also issues of trust are a big issue with me, without trust it greatly affects employee experience. I am going to get back to you regarding the equipment. I look at this as a starting point for discussions and wanting to work through these concerns as best we can. Nothing was done to intentionally hurt employees. For people that were hurt by this my apologies on that, that was not the intention. As commissioner the thing that is most important to me is impact on employees, my apologies for that, this is a starting point going forward. I will be getting together with HR and senior management to talk through some of these issues and concerns and am willing to be a part and present at those conversations where I need to be. I appreciate you all for sharing.

Kristine – There were a few asks: We are asking you to support us in coming to a cooperative teleworking policy during supplemental negotiations. Also teleworking agreements had been canceled as punishment by management in the past, which in these cases would be constructive terminations. In addition not having the proper equipment to do job sets up employees for performance issues which can lead to disciplinary actions such as eliminating teleworking policies. Also asking that commissioner attend supplemental negotiations to address these issues. We would love to partner with you to address these issues. We have draft language for our teleworking proposal, we would love to share. Can you commit to this, does that sound reasonable?

Doty- I would love to see draft of teleworking agreement proposal, has that been shared with HR?

Kristine – Not yet, we were waiting to see what happens at the lead negotiations table. Didn't go well, MMB indicated they want to initiate their own telework policy unilaterally.

Nic – We do have supplemental bargaining meeting scheduled with management next week, will be shared with them

Doty – That would be my opportunity to start to look at that and weigh in, I commit to looking at that and continuing to partner and work together to create the best policy possible, that I can commit to. I can be available to be a part of the supplemental bargaining process as much as possible with the caveat we are in the midst of a legislative session and my time is very booked.

Kristine – I can provide you with language if that will help

Doty – Yes, one of the things I need to do is read through everything

Kristine – We did borrow some of the language from lottery, you might see some familiar language