



**STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

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BILL LEE
GOVERNOR

DANIELLE W. BARNES
COMMISSIONER

April 13, 2020

Mr. Randy Stamps
TSEA
627 Woodland St.
Nashville, TN 37206-4291

Dear Randy,

I am responding on behalf of Commissioner Barnes to the letter Department of Human Services received from you on Monday, April 6, 2020 regarding the department's COVID19 responses and processes for our employees. The Department of Human Services takes the health and safety of our employees very seriously. Early in this pandemic, DHS adopted a process for employees who were at a greater risk for serious illness from COVID-19 to request an accommodation. Rather than requiring employees to use the ADA accommodation process, which can be more time consuming and place additional burdens on the healthcare system to complete required documentation, we created a streamlined process in which an employee could submit the request to our Employee Relations mailbox. Our Employee Relations team reviewed the information and worked with management to determine whether the employee could work from home. In the event an employee is unable to work from home, employees have been approved to take accrued leave, or leave without pay.

DHS offices remain open, as we provide critical services to families, especially in response to recent natural disasters and the pandemic. However, our lobbies are currently closed to walk-in customers, and customers are seen by appointment only. The majority of our teams have been working from home. However, some are required to come into an office occasionally to maintain operations. We have taken steps to promote social distancing within the workplace. For example, we rotate employees who are required to be in the office to minimize the number of employees in an office at any given time. We expanded the number of employees who can work from home; currently 83% of our employees are working from home. When employees are in the office, they have been asked to maintain a distance of 6 feet or more from co-workers and use other precautions recommended by the CDC such as frequent handwashing.

DHS has also taken steps to address concerns about COVID-19, including reports of possible exposure. We formed a COVID-19 response team to triage and respond to reports of possible exposure. We regularly seek guidance from the Department of Health when responding to concerns about COVID-19. In the event an employee exhibits symptoms consistent with COVID-19, we send the employee home even when the test result has not been received, or when no test is available. We also identify other employees who have been in close contact with the individual and send those employees home as well.

DHS works with the Department of General Services to provide additional cleaning in offices with employees who have tested positive for COVID-19, or have exhibited symptoms. If necessary, the office is closed and employees will either work from home or receive admin leave during that time.

As you know, the supply of personal protective equipment is limited, and priority is given to medical professionals. We have communicated to employees that if they are more comfortable working with a face mask while in the office or in the community and are able to provide their own, they are welcome to do so.

I hope this information underscores our commitment to keeping our employees healthy and safe. We will continue to reevaluate our processes to maintain safe practices while giving our employees the ability to continue to work and serve the citizens of Tennessee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Abby Sparks', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Abby Sparks,
Assistant Commissioner of Human Resources and Talent Management-Learning and Development

CC: Danielle W. Barnes, Commissioner, Department of Human Services