

OCEA SOLUTIONS FOR WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

The COVID-19 crisis is rapidly developing in our community. This crisis brings unprecedented instability and challenges for working families. OCEA is working non-stop to ensure that OCEA-represented public workers receive the levels of safety and support these uncertain times demand. OCEA has quickly acted to compel public employers across Orange County to take the tangible steps necessary to adequately protect front-line workers, today and in the coming weeks and months.

To state the obvious, OCEA members are on the front-lines of this crisis. We are in public health labs, social services, community protection, and in every other part of our community safety net. Now, more than ever, we need to be able to serve the community while being provided with the highest level of physical and economic protection and security in the workplace.

It is essential that public employers respond to this crisis by promptly developing and implementing policies and protocols that sufficiently protect workers, their families and the community from the COVID-19 virus. Here are some of the policies OCEA has urged public employers in Orange County to adopt:

- **TELECOMMUTE OPTIONS:** Direct each department head, agency head and manager to take aggressive action to: (1) identify workers who can perform their jobs from home; and (2) if needed, provide those workers with the necessary equipment to telecommute. Decisions should be made based on creating an environment that most effectively encourages social distancing rather than on the relative convenience of implementing the policy.
- **FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS:** Direct each department head, agency head and manager to take aggressive action to solicit worker input regarding their need for a flexible work schedule and whenever feasible implement such schedules for the duration of the crisis. No public worker should be harmed financially because they are required to care for themselves and their family during this unprecedented crisis.
- **PAID LEAVE FOR IMPACTED WORKERS:** If a worker is no longer required to come to work, or if coming to work would risk violation of federal or state guidelines regarding COVID-19, provide the worker with paid leave.
- **SANITIZED AND CLEAN PUBLIC AREAS AND WORKPLACES:** Institute frequent hospital-grade sanitization and cleaning of all jurisdictional facilities and public areas.
- **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT:** Provide appropriate personal protective equipment to workers.
- **NON-ESSENTIAL PUBLIC INTERACTIONS:** Close or reduce access to public buildings and counters to members of the public, and institute social distancing measures in workplaces and in the field to comply with California Department of Public Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations and guidelines.
- **SOCIAL DISTANCING:** Reconfigure or reassign workstations to guarantee at least six feet of social distancing at all times. Under no circumstance should workers be compelled to violate social distancing recommendations, including in high density work locations, meetings and other gatherings of workers.
- **HAZARD PAY:** Provide all workers hazard pay in the amount of one and a half their normal rate of pay for all hours worked in the office or in the field during this crisis.
- **CLEAR DIRECTIVES TO WORKERS POTENTIALLY EXPOSED TO COVID-19:** All workers should be provided with clear and consistent directives to follow if they believe they have come into contact with the COVID-19 virus.
- **ENHANCED PROTECTION FOR FRONT-LINE WORKERS INFECTED WITH COVID-19:** Public workers must regularly interact with the public to perform their job duties. If a public worker is infected with COVID-19, the employer shall presume the infection was a result of their work. This will help protect front-line workers financially during infection in the event they contract the virus.

OCEA members are often the experts when it comes to responding to the COVID-19 crisis. Now, more than ever, employers need to listen to workers and provide safe working conditions, proper equipment, flexible leave and work schedules, and economic security. Our community relies on public workers during the crisis, and once it has passed, public workers will be there to facilitate a return to normalcy. We are truly all in this together.