Policy

This policy shall provide a written procedure providing rules and guidelines governing remote work (telework) for Howard County Government employees. County Employees, with some exceptions, may apply to participate in the Howard County Telework Program (the “Telework Program”).

Purpose

The goals of the Howard County telework program are to improve the quality of work/life, improve productivity, achieve savings in office space cost, reduce absenteeism, decrease turnover, and increase job satisfaction. It is an effective program to provide greater flexibility and lower stress for employees, while helping the community meet the challenges of reducing air pollution and traffic congestion.

Teleworking lends itself to those situations where technology enables the work to be performed at a remote location without loss in quality, service, health and safety, and overall standards of performance. The arrangement is generally voluntary but may become a required condition of employment. In such instances, advance notice of the change would be given.

While telework is as an important and attractive work option for some Howard County employees, the County maintains the authority to determine when, and if, teleworking is appropriate and suitable for a position and an employee.

Teleworking is a privilege, not a benefit or employee entitlement. It is, instead, an option that management uses whenever it determines that it is most appropriate for the situation and circumstances.

Definitions

1. Designated Office - means the employee’s usual and customary County work address.
2. **Eligible Employee** - means any employee whose position lends itself to teleworking, with the approval of the immediate supervisor, Department Head/Administrator, Risk Management Administrator, Director of Department of Technology and Communication Services (DTCS), Human Resources Administrator and Chief Administrative Officer.

3. **FSLA Exempt Employee** - means those employees who are exempt from the rules of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FSLA).

4. **FLSA Non-Exempt Employee** - means those employees who are covered by the rules of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and who are entitled to be paid overtime at a time and a half rate for any hours worked in excess of forty hours per week.

5. **Howard County Secure Work Guidelines** - a set of standards established by the DTCS to protect the County system and data. All telework eligible employees must read and comply with these guidelines (Exhibit 3).

6. **Remote Access** - is defined as an employee’s ability to access the County network from the employee’s remote location to retrieve and store computer files. Remote access may or may not be part of the Telework Agreement.

7. **Remote Work Location** - means a work site alternative to the designated office as specified in the Telework Agreement. It may be in the employee’s home or an alternative workspace approved by the Appointing Authority and is subject to review and approval by the Office of Human Resources and Chief Administrative Officer.

8. **Telework** also known as telecommuting, except when required, is defined as a mutually agreed-upon work option between Howard County Government and an employee, where the employee works at a remote work location on specified days and/or hours and at the designated office or at field assignments the remainder of the time, retaining flexibility as necessary to meet the needs of the work unit. The telework schedule is agreed upon by the Appointing Authority, the employee’s supervisor and the employee, and is subject to review and approval by the Office of Human Resources and Chief Administrative Officer. Situational telework is telework that is approved on a case-by-case basis, where the hours worked were NOT part of a previously approved, ongoing and regular telework schedule, and is sometimes also referred to as episodic, intermittent, unscheduled, or ad-hoc. Employees who accept a Telework Agreement may also be required to work remotely due to operational necessity.

9. **Telework Agreement** - specifies the terms and conditions of telework. (Exhibit 1).
Authority

The Chief Administrative Officer will provide general guidelines to Appointing Authorities and resolve uncertainties between any provision of these policy provisions, the Howard County Code and the Employee Manual.

While Appointing Authorities may establish flexible work schedules for assigned employees, the Chief Administrative Officer must approve all teleworking arrangements.

Appointing Authorities are solely responsible for establishing working hours for all Departmental employees. Their decisions will be guided by the following factors:

- The ability of the office to meet its workload requirements;
- Availability of experienced staff and supervisors during all work hours;
- Employee’s ability and work history;
- Availability of complete office coverage during the normal business day;
- Ability to continue interaction with other County agencies, the public, and our customers (the Appointing Authority must ensure that services to the public and interaction with other County offices and workers will be complementary, and will not be impaired by approving requested telework schedules);
- Assurance that the approval of a telework schedule is not in conflict with current policies, procedures, and/or County law;
- Flexibility to adjust an employee’s approved telework schedule to accommodate changes in the work environment, etc. (to include the daily lunch period, changing the work start and end beginning due to special circumstances, responding to emergency situations, etc.)
- The ability of work to be completed in safe working conditions;
- Employee has completed probation.

Basic Procedure

(A) CONDITIONS:

1. Work Week and Overtime

Standard hours of work will be established for each employee. Employees will be required to work hours mandated by Code or contract or to otherwise account for their hours by the use of leave. Care should be taken when designing telework schedules to make sure full-time FLSA non-exempt employees are scheduled to be paid for 40 hours a week (through hours worked or paid leave) while not incurring unnecessary overtime costs. Full-time FLSA exempt employees have more flexibility and may work their normally scheduled 80 hours over a two week pay period.
Prior to authorizing a specific telework schedule for any employee, Appointing Authorities must remember that the requirements of the FLSA cannot be waived for covered FLSA non-exempt employees and will apply to all work situations. Other pay plan provisions may also affect employees who are exempt from the requirements of the FLSA.

FLSA non-exempt employees and overtime are not permitted to work more than forty hours in one week or to average their hours over a two week pay period. An employee or supervisor who is not sure of the FLSA exemption or overtime eligible status of a specific employee should contact the Appointing Authority or the Office of Human Resources for clarification.

Telework employees whether FLSA Exempt or non-Exempt must get prior approval from their supervisor to work any hours outside of their approved telework schedule including any overtime or compensatory time.

2. **Current Policies**

Implementation of a telework schedule will in no way change or modify current policies and procedures. The County recognizes time off from work to attend personal needs and family obligations. *Telework should not be a substitute for taking paid accrued leave.*

3. **Availability**

Employees may be requested to report to their Designated Office on a day otherwise scheduled as a Telework Day if needed for operational purposes. Employees must be prepared and available to report if requested.

4. **Communication**

Employees must be available by phone, email and web conference during their telework schedule. All client interactions will be conducted on a management approved client or County site. Teleworking employees will be available for in-person or virtual staff meetings, and other meetings deemed necessary by management.

5. **Supervisory Oversight**

Appointing Authorities must ensure that teleworking employees document the work they have completed while teleworking in writing. These records must be kept for one year.

6. **Written Agreement**

All telework scheduling agreements between employees and Appointing
Authorities must be documented in writing and signed by both parties. The agreement should contain a description of the telework schedule and an acknowledgement by the employee that the provisions of this policy have been read and understood.

7. **Eligibility**

Employees will be approved based on the suitability of their jobs to telework, an evaluation of the likelihood of them being successful teleworkers which includes current and prior work performance and an evaluation of their supervisor’s ability to manage remote workers.

Probationary employees may be approved for telework based on the recommendation of their Appointing Authority and approval of the Chief Administrative Officer.

8. **Equipment/Tools**

Employees may only telework using County approved devices. The County may provide specific tools/equipment and access for the employee to perform their duties. This may include computer hardware, computer software, email, voice-mail, connectivity to host applications, and other applicable equipment as deemed necessary. The County may access and monitor usage.

The County will not duplicate resources between the central work place and the alternate work location. Remote work employees may use County-owned equipment only for legitimate County purposes. Remote work employees are responsible for protecting County-owned equipment from theft, damage and unauthorized use. The County will maintain, service and repair County-owned equipment used in the normal course of employment. Remote employees are responsible for transporting and installing equipment at their alternate work location, and for returning it to the central workplace for repairs or service.

DTCS must evaluate and approve use of all equipment – including the employee’s own, personal equipment. When the employee is authorized to use their own equipment, the employee is responsible for the maintenance and repair of the equipment. At no time should County systems or data be accessed or used by non-employees.

9. **Inclement Weather**

It is a County priority to ensure continuity of operations during inclement weather or other emergency conditions. In the event a County declared general or weather-related emergency closes the Teleworker's Designated Office, a non-essential employee scheduled to Telework will not be required to work
remotely. Teleworking employees will be required to work their normal scheduled hours during a late opening or early closing.

During a liberal leave period, a non-essential employee scheduled to Telework is expected to work remotely during that period. If a Teleworker is not scheduled to Telework during a liberal leave period, they are encouraged to Telework with the approval of their Supervisor.

If the Teleworker chooses not to work remotely on a scheduled Telework day during a liberal leave period, the Teleworker must notify their Manager of the Teleworker's leave status and use leave in accordance with the liberal leave policy to cover hours not worked.

10. **Remote Work Location**

The employee shall maintain a workspace in a safe condition, free from hazards and other dangers to the employee and equipment. The workspace must permit the ability to maintain confidentiality where required. Any County materials taken home should be kept in a secure designated work area at home and not be made accessible to others.

The County has the right to make on-site visits or virtual inspections to the remote work location for purposes of determining that the site is safe and free from hazards, to maintain, repair, inspect, or retrieve company-owned equipment, software, data or supplies and otherwise check for appropriate usage.

Any change of the Remote Work Location requires resubmission of the telework agreement.

11. **Office Supplies**

Office supplies will be provided by the County as needed. Out-of-pocket expenses for other supplies will not be reimbursed unless by prior written approval of department management.

12. **Training**

Employee and management must attend telework training where required.

13. **Dependent Care**

Telework is not a substitute for dependent care. Telework is not be authorized to allow the teleworker to provide care to any individual during Telework hours. However, a dependent may be home while the employee teleworks if the dependent is independently pursuing their own activities or otherwise cared for by a caretaker.
14. **Meal Period**

Every employee will receive a meal period under Section 1.113 of the County Code. This section means that each employee must receive a minimum of at least one-half hour without pay to consume a meal for each day worked. Telework schedules may not circumvent the meal period requirement. Telework meal periods should be the same as the employee’s normally scheduled meal period.

15. **Worker’s Compensation**

During work hours and while performing work functions in the Remote Work Location telecommuters are covered by worker’s compensation.

16. **Liability**

The employee’s Remote Work Location will be considered an extension of the Designated Office. In accordance with the provisions of the Maryland Workers’ Compensation Act, the County will be responsible for job-related accidents, injuries or illness that occur to the employee in the Remote Work Location during the employee’s agreed-upon work hours. Coverage will apply to injuries that arise out of and occur within the scope of employment per applicable law.

17. **Evaluation**

The employee shall agree to timely participate in all inspections, studies, inquiries, reports and analyses relating to the telework program. The employee is obligated to comply with all County and departmental policies, rules, regulations, practices and instructions.

18. **Taxes**

It will be the employee’s responsibility to determine any income tax implications of maintaining a Remote Telework Location. The County will not provide tax guidance nor assume any additional tax liabilities. Employees are encouraged to consult with a qualified tax professional to discuss possible income tax implications.

(B) **ABUSE OF TELEWORK POLICY**

Telework participation will be terminated when the employee no longer meets the eligibility criteria. Telework Agreements may be terminated at any time. Reasons for termination of a Telework Agreement include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Performance falls below the satisfactory level,
2. When customer service is adversely affected,
3. Because of conduct or other performance concerns,
4. Other requirements of the Telework Arrangement are not fulfilled.
5. Violation of any County Policies.

In addition to the revocation of the telework privilege the Appointing Authority may take disciplinary action up to and including termination for any dishonesty, insubordination, misconduct, or violation of County policy.

(C) TELEWORK SCHEDULE OPTIONS

Employees may be approved to telework one, two, or a maximum of three days per week. Telework schedules should be consistent with the employee’s normal work schedules as provided in the Employee Manual. Supervisors may approve situational telework for those employees with an approved telework agreement.

(D) RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Employee:
   a. Follow the provisions of the Telework Policy.
   b. Work with their Manager/Supervisor to come to an agreement on and comply with the terms and conditions of the Telework Agreement.
   c. Follow all applicable laws, rules, regulations, policies, directives, codes, and procedures to ensure the security and confidentiality of official documents and records.
   d. Follow all applicable laws, rules, regulations, directives, codes, policies and procedures relating to workplace conduct and performance.
   e. Work Performance:

   A Teleworker participating in the Telework Program is expected to perform their duties and responsibilities at the Remote Work Location at the minimum acceptable performance level or greater.

   A Teleworker's job responsibilities will not change due to participation in the Telework Program. The Manager may require the Teleworker to submit regular status reports or other information to help evaluate work performance. A decline in work performance or a decline in service to the Teleworker's internal and external customers may result in adjustments to the Telework Arrangement or termination from the Telework Program. The Teleworker's performance plan will be modified to include Telework requirements.

   A Teleworker will be held to the same performance evaluation standards as other employees in the County who do not Telework.

2. Supervisor:
a. Preliminary Assessment

1. The telework assignment must make sound business sense, be fiscally responsible and benefit the County and its taxpaying residents. The supervisor in conjunction with the Appointing Authority, identifies the class of work that may lend itself to telework. Employees within this class of work may request or be requested to apply for a telework assignment after successfully completing their probationary period. Exceptions to this requirement may be approved by the Chief Administrative Officer.

2. Approval of Telework Agreements must be made fairly and without prejudice or partiality.

3. The supervisor will only consider employees for a Telework Agreement who have demonstrated a good safety work record, work habits and performance well suited to successful telework. The following guidelines shall be considered:

   **Work habits:** Teleworkers must have demonstrated self-motivation, self-discipline, the ability to work independently, strong communication skills, responsiveness to others, the ability to manage distractions, and the ability to meet deadlines.

   **Position:** The teleworker’s position must have little to no requirement for direct supervision or contact with customers in the office setting; the teleworker’s need for specialized material must be minimal or flexible; and the teleworker’s work objectives and tasks must be clearly defined with measurable results.

   **Service impact:** The telework must be arranged so that there is no decrease in the required level of customer service.

b. Review the (electronic) telework request.
   - Detail technology needs.
   - Note any FLSA and ensure the plan is FLSA compliant.
   - Approve the request.

c. Communication

The Supervisors and Teleworker agree to review the work plan, review completed work, and/or discuss by phone, email, or face-to-face. This review can be daily or weekly during the initial thirty (30) calendar days of the Teleworking Agreement. Further review of work will be at the Supervisor's discretion. The Teleworker must be available by phone
during scheduled hours and agrees to respond to emails and phone calls during this period. Specific deadlines for returning emails and phone calls will be determined by the Supervisor.

The supervisor will update internal duty rosters as needed and notify the teleworking employee’s co-workers and others with whom the employee interacts regarding the telework schedule and make provisions for any Designated Office impact telework may create.

d. Documenting Work Performance of Employees

The Supervisor will be responsible for monitoring and documenting the work performance of the teleworking employee, review the daily or weekly work reports, and ensure that any telework reporting is performed.

e. Rescinding or Termination of Employee Telework

When a Telework Agreement is rescinded or terminated, the supervisor will:

- Send a notification to Human Resources indicating date of and reason for termination.
- Notify Risk Management of the date of the termination.
- Notify DTCS of the date of termination, request termination of remote access and facilitate return of any equipment provided for telework and ensure that the County Equipment Inventory form has been properly updated.

3. Procedure for the Appointing Authority:

In conjunction with the Supervisor, the Appointing Authority will:

a. Receive departmental telework request.

b. Carefully review the submission to ensure schedule, accessibility issues, proposed Remote Work Location meets requirements, dependent care, and all other requirements are satisfied.

c. Verify that all required forms are reviewed for completion and accuracy reviewed prior to submission to DTCS.

d. Upon approval by Technology & Communication, Human Resources, Risk Management, and the Chief Administrative Officer, communicate the outcome to the Supervisor.

e. Submit an annual report to the Chief Administrative Officer and the Human Resources Administrator detailing the number of teleworkers, the job classification and aggregated data about the specific enhancement, benefits, challenges, and successful best practices identified in the department’s telework program.
4. Procedure for Department of Technology and Communication (DTCS):
   a. Following satisfactory preliminary results of the above, the request will go to DTCS to assess software needs, evaluate data security, network access, peripheral equipment requests where appropriate, technical supports needs, etc.
   b. When all requirements are satisfied, approval will be granted, and the agreement forwarded to Risk Management.

5. Procedure for Risk Management:
   a. Risk Management will provide a telework office checklist (Exhibit 2) for employees to review and certify. Risk Management will also review verification of the required homeowner’s or renter’s insurance coverage.
   b. When all requirements are satisfied, approval will be granted, and the agreement forwarded to Human Resources.

6. Procedure for Human Resources:
   a. Human Resources will review for FLSA compliance and all other requirements as needed.
   b. When all requirements are satisfied, HR will approve, and the agreement will be forwarded to the Chief Administrative Officer.

7. Procedure for the Chief Administrative Officer:
   a. The Chief Administrative Officer or their designee will review the request.
   b. If approved by the Chief Administrative Officer or their designee, HR will send a copy of the approval to the requesting department and place a copy of the approval and signed agreements in the employee’s official file.
   c. If an employee is denied at any level they may seek reconsideration from the Chief Administrative Officer.

Exhibits:
1. Telework Agreement
2. Risk Management Telework Office Checklist

Lonnie R. Robbins
Chief Administrative Officer

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CERTIFICATION

“This Policy and Procedure is not subject to the provision of the Howard County Administrative Procedures Act.”

Gary W. Kuc
County Solicitor

6/16/2021
Date
Employee Telework Request Form
Employee Telework Program Agreement

The intent of this Agreement is to define your telework schedule and acknowledge your confirmation and acceptance of the Howard County Telework Policy, the Secure Remote Work Guidelines, the Risk Management Telework Office Checklist and the Telework Notebook Computer Agreement. In addition to these acknowledgements, employees must submit proof of homeowners or renter’s insurance. This Agreement will only become effective if approved by your supervisor, your Appointing Authority, the Office of Risk Management, the Department of Technology and Communication Services, the Office of Human Resources and the Chief Administrative Officer.

While teleworking, you are bound by all applicable County personnel laws, regulations, policies and procedures. You must submit your work time via the method currently in use.

You must remain accessible to your supervisor by telephone and email during your normal work hours whether you are working a flexible, regular, or alternate work schedule. Additionally, changes to your work schedule must be pre-approved by your supervisor.

Telework may not be used to supplement or supplant child or other-person care.

All normal policies associated with leave usage remain in place. If you are unable to work, you must request and be approved for leave.

During your approved telework schedule you are required to:

1. Regularly check voicemails and timely respond to messages and emails while teleworking.
2. Maintain the security of confidential or sensitive information and protect County records from unauthorized disclosure.
3. Report on the work performed on a schedule established by your supervisor (daily, weekly, bi-weekly).

Revocation of telework privileges may occur at the sole discretion of the Appointing Authority or designee if an employee fails to comply with the County's Teleworking Policy. Nothing in this Agreement precludes the department from taking any appropriate action, up to and including termination, against an employee for failing to comply with the provisions of the Teleworking Policy or this Agreement.

Click here to view the Howard County Telework Policy

Click here to view the Howard County Secure Remote Work Guidelines

Click here to download and complete the Risk Management Telework Checklist

Step 1

* Employee's Name

* Supervisor's Name

* Department Head's Name

Job Classification

Technical Serv Support Spec IV

* Department

Department of Technology and Communication Services
Step 2

* What is the telework location address?

Situational/Intermittent Telework Request

-- None --

What will be your telework schedule?

Step 3

Are you requesting to take home any of the following equipment?

* I have read the Howard County Telework Policy and accept the Terms and Conditions of this agreement.

* I have read and accept Howard County's Secure Remote Work Guidelines.

* I have read and attest that I can comply with the Risk Management Telework Checklist and have attached the completed checklist below.

Please attach PROOF OF INSURANCE and the COMPLETED RISK MANAGEMENT TELEWORK CHECKLIST

Add attachments

Submit
SELF-CERTIFICATION FOR TELEWORK LOCATION

Dear Howard County Government Employee,

Risk Management has received your Request for Telework application and will use the following information to evaluate your proposed telework environment. You are required to review this information, provide all requested documentation, and certify your understanding of the liability requirements.

Please return all requested documents to The Office of Risk Management by email at risk@howardcountymd.gov. Should you have any questions, please call Risk Management at (410) 313-6390.

WORKSPACE DESCRIPTION

Provide a brief description of the proposed workspace. Include approximate square footage, floor surface, furnishings, location within the telework site, etc.

SAFETY CHECKLIST

The following checklist is designed to assess the overall safety of your alternate worksite and raise awareness of the need for a safe workplace that is conducive to productive work. The following list does not represent all possible situations; employees are encouraged to obtain professional assistance with issues concerning appropriate workplace conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the space free of indoor air quality problems with adequate ventilation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a drinkable water supply?</td>
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<td>Are all stairs with four or more steps equipped with handrails?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is all electrical equipment free of recognized hazards that would cause physical harm (frayed wires, bare conductors, loose wires, flexible wires running through the walls, exposed wires fixed to the ceiling)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are file cabinets and storage closets arranged so drawers and doors do not open into walkways?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the work area furnished to provide ease of movement and is free of tripping hazards?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the office space neat, clean and free of excessive amounts of combustibles?</td>
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</table>
WORKER'S COMPENSATION
The employee's home workspace is an extension of The County's workspace only when used for work. Employees may therefore be covered for workers compensation if they are injured while performing work on behalf of the employer in the employee's home workspace during teleworking hours.

As such:
• Howard County Government is not responsible for any injuries to family members, visitors, or other people in the employee's home workspace.
• The teleworker may not have business guests at the employee's home workspace or any other location except the agency's offices.
• The teleworker is covered under the State's Workers Compensation Law for injuries occurring in the course of the actual performance of official duties at the Remote Work Site.

If an injury occurs during teleworking hours, the employee must immediately report the injury to their supervisor. The employee, Supervisor, and Department must follow County policies for reporting employees injured while at work. Workers compensation claims fraud is a crime.

PROPERTY
The employee is responsible for contacting their insurance agent and consulting local ordinances for information regarding home workplaces. Employee auto and homeowner's (or renter's) insurance costs are the responsibility of the employee.

The County will not be responsible for any loss or damage to:
• The employee's real property, including any structures attached thereto, except to the extent required under Maryland law.
• Any personal property owned by the employee or any of the employee's family members
• Property of others in the care, custody, or control of the employee or any of the employee's family members

INSURANCE
The employee is responsible for maintaining homeowner's or renter's insurance. The policy must list the employee named in this agreement as the primary insured, with coverage that provides a minimum:
• $100,000 General Liability
• $25,000 Personal Property
• Sewer Backup coverage is highly recommended

INSPECTIONS
The employee's Director, Risk Management Administrator, or their designee may make an on-site visit to the Remote Work Site during the employee's scheduled telework hours for the purposes of verifying that the employee is teleworking as scheduled, determining that the site is safe and free from hazards. Visits may also include the inspection, maintenance, repair, or retrieval of agency-owned property.

CERTIFY
I have fully read and understand the Safety Checklist and Telework Site Liability Information.

Employee's name (print)

Employee's Signature  Date
OFFICE ERGONOMICS BASICS

This graphic illustrates neutral seated and standing postures for your computer workstation. The following section provides suggestions and guidance on how to achieve these postures within your home/virtual work environment.

**Head, Neck, & Eyes**
- Position your monitor about an arm's length away
- Adjust the monitor height so the top of the viewing area is slightly below your eye should be decreased for bifocal users
- Place the document holder at the same height as the monitor's viewing area, or in line with monitor

**Back & Shoulders**
- If seated, make sure to select a chair with lumbar support that adjusts to fit your lower
- Arms should rest at the side of your body while using the keyboard
- Place the mouse next to the keyboard, at the same height

**Elbows & Forearms**
- Your elbow should be bent between 90 – 110 degrees
- Ensure the keyboard is positioned slightly below your elbow height
- If seated, lower or remove arm rests during typing tasks to prevent elevation of arm/shoulder

**Hands & Wrists**
- Keep your wrists straight while typing by placing the keyboard/mouse slightly below elbow height
- Place wrist rests so they do not contact your hands or wrists while typing
- Hold the mouse with a relaxed grip during use and relax hand while not in use
- Depress the keys lightly and remove your hands from the keyboard when not typing
- Flatten the feet on the underside of your keyboard to minimize wrist bending

**Lower Extremities**
- If seated, adjust the seat pan to fully support your upper legs, allowing space for 2-3 fingers between the back of the knee and the front of the seat
- Position your knee joint angle between 90 – 110 degrees with feet resting flat on the floor or footrest
- If standing, use anti-fatigue matting or anti-fatigue insoles/shoes for additional comfort
- You can also prop one foot up on a footrest and alternate between legs

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**CERTIFY**
I have reviewed the Telework Ergonomics Guide above.

**Employee’s name (print)**

**Employee’s Signature**

**Date**
Howard County Employees are the first line of defense in protecting the county’s systems and data. By following the precautions below, your actions and awareness will help ensure the security of county resources while working from home.

**Follow the steps below when you access county emails, files, or systems from home.** These steps will help protect against account compromise, data theft, and full-system loss due to ransomware or other malicious attacks.

1. **Add Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) to Your Account Log-in:** In the upcoming weeks, Howard County will allow all users to add a text message, voice call, or authenticator code to your Microsoft 365 log-in. This makes it harder for an attacker to gain access to your account.

2. **Never Click Suspicious Website Advertisements or Social Media Links.**

3. **Report Suspicious Emails with the “Phish Alert” button:** Over 80% of system attacks start with clicking a malicious email link or opening a harmful attachment.

4. **Protect your device.** Avoid using a work device in public areas or sharing your work device with others. Always lock your screen (`Ctrl + L` on Windows). Do not leave your device unattended or in a car.

5. **Keep Files on the County Network:** Use OneDrive, SharePoint, and Office 365 applications. This ensures county data is backed up. Files should never be stored on a non-county device.

6. **Do Not Share Files with Confidential Data with External Vendors or Non-County Employees.** These include files with social security numbers, credit card numbers, or personal health information.

7. **Limit Confidential File Sharing with Internal Howard County Users.** For example, only share a sensitive file with specific users, not “All Howard County Employees.”

8. **Use a Strong Password.** Reset your password to something new, and do not simply add a number each time you are required to change your password.

9. **Use Secure WiFi.** When at home, ensure your wireless router requires a strong password for login. When using public WiFi, avoid connecting to sensitive sites or data.
Report the following issues to DTCS by emailing snap@howardcountymd.gov:

- Your device is misplaced or stolen.
- Your email account is sending mail without your permission.
- Repeated Cisco AnyConnect VPN connectivity drops. If you experience multiple VPN connectivity drops within a 4-hour period, this may indicate another individual is attempting to login using your credentials.
- Extremely slow VPN connection speeds. This may indicate a larger global issue.
- Lack of required access to specific county files, applications, systems, or hardware.*

*System access or hardware requests for employees working remotely must be submitted through department liaisons for evaluation by DTCS.

Call the DTCS Help Desk at (410) 313-2095 or email snap@howardcountymd.gov with any questions.