



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**

GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

**Department of Administration**

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**RECEIVED**  
JUL 05 2013  
ASEA/AFSCME LOCAL 52

July 3, 2013

ASEA/AFSCME Local 52  
Attn: Jim Duncan, Executive Director  
2601 Denali Street  
Anchorage, AK 99503

Re: Universal Space Standards

Dear Mr. Duncan:

The State is in receipt of your letter dated July 1, 2013 requesting the State to immediately cease the implementation of Universal Space Standards (USS). Your letter brings up several points which I have responded to individually below:

1. Article 37C of the ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 Collective Bargaining Agreement:

**State Response:** I disagree that implementation of the USS is a change in working conditions requiring negotiations under Article 37 of the agreement between the parties. This action falls squarely under Article 4, Management Rights, allowing the employer to take actions in carrying out its function of managing the enterprise.

2. Detrimental effect of the new standards on working conditions of employees and the negative impact on employee morale:

**State Response:** While cost savings through a reduction in lease costs over the long term is one of the driving factors behind the implementation of the USS, working conditions of employees have been carefully considered.

The employees' "right to light" was one of the critical factors taken into consideration. For many years, most State employees have been located in cubicles nestled in the center of a building's core with large private offices dominating the exterior walls and

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windows. The "right to light" will permit every employee, regardless of job class or title, access to natural light in a modern workspace that features adjustable LED lighting and ergonomic sit/stand desks to help employees stay active and energized at work. The new space standards result in a bright, modern and highly functional office space. Feedback from employees who have seen space under construction in the Atwood and State Office Building so far has been positive.

I think much of the concern comes from the physical size of the cubicles, but what that does not take into account is the amount of shared space that all employees have access to for storage, meetings, team collaboration, private conversations, etc. The spaces have been designed to be open, inviting, and create a sense of team that will increase employee collaboration and communication. By gathering employees into areas where their work coincides, and establishing more efficient communication, the State would specifically be increasing morale and removing isolation from inside a cubicle space.

3. 6 ft. by 8 ft. cubicles are the same size as a standard prison cell:

**State Response:** It is true that under the Universal Space Standards most employees across all bargaining units will work in a standard 6 ft. x 8 ft. workstation. Employees routinely get up from their work space to grab a snack or drink, find people to interact with during breaks, talk about work issues, or to socially interact. Workstation walls have a maximum height of just 66" at the center spine and that gradually drops off to just 42" on the side. This graduated height design takes advantage of open space to create a workstation that not only feels spacious but operates in a more efficient manner due to wraparound work surfaces and secure storage for every employee. In addition, many of the side panels are of glass construction to further accentuate the right to light.

In addition, most employees will have the ability to customize their workstation with the features they need to complete their duties, such as extra filing areas, more bookshelves or extra work surfaces. Additionally, the new standard allows for a sit/stand work surface which has been extremely popular for employees' personal well-being.

4. Immediate increase in cost to the State; perceived savings of \$125 million:

**State Response:** The majority of furniture used by State employees are outdated, stained, damaged and no longer supported by the manufacturer. While each Universal

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Space Standards project must show savings over a 10-20 year term, to date the Universal Space Standards projects have an estimated 10 year savings of over \$50 million and a 20 year savings of over \$125 million Further implementation will only increase the overall savings and permit agencies to use available funding to help meet the agencies stated mission.

5. Personal items in individual cubes:

**State Response:** While personal refrigerators and microwaves are no longer permitted, items such as personal coffee pots and small fans are still authorized per DGS SOP 013-08. This SOP clearly defines what types of items are not permitted in an individual workstation. Ergonomics studies recommend that individuals get regular movement out of their seated workstation at least once every 45 minutes to avoid the negative health effects of office inactivity. Large cafés are provided within the Universal Space Standards that include ample kitchen appliances and an open, inviting space for employees to take a break or have a personal conversation.

6. Clean Desk Policy:

**State Response:** State offices should be clean, neat, and represent the State in a professional manner. It is critical to realize, in many cases, our desks are what our customers see. Employees should maintain their desk in a professional manner as we treat our customers with the respect they deserve and our documents with the security they require.

Small decorations and items of a personal nature are not prohibited, but they must be inside the employee's workstation. As indicated in the SOP, this policy provides standards to promote a safe, efficient, professional and clean office environment in State leased and owned facilities.

One of the goals of the clean desk policy is to create an office environment that is pleasant to be in, ergonomic, allows each employee access to natural light, and encourages staff to interact in new and more collaborative ways as we move forward as a state.

As mentioned above, the State is not required to discuss the implementation of the Universal Space Standards with the Union and as such, the State of Alaska will continue to implement the Universal Space Standards when it is fiscally prudent to do so.

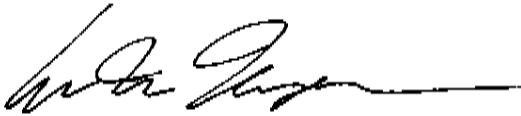
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I would urge you to not make assumptions about declining productivity or service to the public without first seeing the space. I invite you to visit the Division of General Services in Juneau later this month to see exactly what the Universal Space Standards look like in person or a time can be set-up to tour recently converted space at the Department of Administration, Department of Corrections, or Department of Revenue. I think you'll find the offices are spacious, inviting, and exciting places to work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Curtis Thayer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Curtis Thayer

Deputy Commissioner

cc: Sean Parnell, Governor  
State of Alaska

Becky Hultberg, Commissioner