

## ***IV. Improvement of the Work Environment***

### **1. Introduction of Diverse Working Patterns**

#### **(1) Introduction of the Short-Time Working System for Child Care**

In order to respond to the rapid decline in the birthrate in Japan, it is important to improve the work environment for public employees as soon as possible so that they can balance work and family life. The NPA has developed measures to support the balancing of work and family life. As one of such measures, the NPA expressed its opinion in the “revision of the law concerning child care leave for national public employees to introduce the short-time working system for child care” to the Diet and the Cabinet on August 8, 2006. This opinion was aimed to support national public employees so that they can fulfill their responsibilities in child care without leaving the public service completely.

Once it is introduced, the system will enable public employees to balance their work and child care over an extended period of time without degrading public service levels. At present, only a limited number of male public employees take the child care leave. The system is expected to contribute to the increased participation of male employees in child care.

Based on the expression of this opinion, the “Bills to Partially Amend the Law concerning Child Care Leave of National Public Employees” was submitted to the 166th Diet session on February 13, 2007.

(Note: The bill was enacted on May 9, 2007, almost in conformity with the NPA opinion, and published on May 16, 2007.)

## **Outline of Submission of Opinions concerning the Introduction of the Short-time Working System for child Care**

With the growing need to reverse the decline in the birthrate, child care by employees in the public sector should be supported without increasing labor costs and the fixed number of personnel. To this end, the Law concerning Child Care Leave should be amended to introduce (1) the short-time working system for child care, (2) fixed-term part-time employees to compensate for a reduction in work force, and (3) a system for job sharing, thereby enabling public employees to balance work and child care over the long term and encouraging male public employees to take child care leave.

### **1. Short-time working for Child care**

- (1) When an employee requests a shortening of working hours to take care of his or her child of pre-school age, the appointing officer should approve the request unless it causes any problems for the administration of public duty.
- (2) The applicable short-time work schedule should be settled from types such as 4 hours a day (a 20-hour workweek) and 3 days a week (a 24-hour workweek).
- (3) It should be possible for two employees who are working 20-hour workweeks under the short-time working system for child care to be appointed to the same full-time position (job sharing) and a full-time employee to be appointed to the position that becomes vacant as a result.
- (4) The amounts of salary, area allowances and bonuses should be determined according to the working hours.

### **2. Fixed-term part-time employees**

- (1) The appointing officer should be able to appoint a fixed-term part-time employee to take on the work that the employee working under the short-time working system for child care cannot handle.
- (2) The working hours should be determined within the range of 10 to 20 hours per week.
- (3) The amounts of salary, area allowances and bonuses should be determined according to the working hours, based on salary schedules. Monthly allowances should not be paid in principle.

### **3. Effective Date**

The implementation should be effective within one year from the day of promulgation.

## **(2) Introduction of the Self-Development Leave System**

Recently, the social environment surrounding public services has been changing significantly as a result of factors such as internationalization, computerization, the aging population combined with the falling birthrate, and diversification of individual attitudes, sense of values, and lifestyles. The issues of public administration are also becoming more complex and sophisticated in association with these changes. The public sector needs to promote a broad range of human resources development for public employees to respond to these changes. For this purpose, establishing a flexible mechanism which actively utilizes the initiative and voluntarism of employees will be helpful. Such a mechanism is also expected to enhance the vitality of government organizations. In the private sector, there is also a move to recommend the introduction of a school attendance leave system to support voluntary capacity building of employees and the momentum for introducing such a mechanism is increasing.

The Official Development Assistance Charter (approved by the Cabinet on August 29, 2003) stipulates the facilitation of international contributions by personnel. Considering this, and in order to utilize the initiative and voluntarism of employees actively, as well as to further promote organizational vitalization and employees' awareness on public services, it is necessary to introduce a mechanism to support proactive international contribution activities by willing employees.

In view of these points, the NPA submitted its opinion on the enactment of the "Act concerning the Self-Development Leave for Regular Service Employees" to the Diet and the Cabinet on August 8, 2006. The proposed law permits employees to leave their service maintaining the status as a public employee in order to study at a graduate school, etc. voluntarily or participate in international contribution activities for an international cooperation.

Based on this opinion, the "Bill concerning the Self-Development Leave for National Public Employees" was submitted to the 166th Diet meeting on February 13, 2007.

(Note: The bill was enacted on May 9, 2007, almost in conformity with the NPA opinion, and published on May 16, 2007.)

### **Outline of Submission of Opinions concerning the Enactment of the Act on Self-Development Leave**

A leave of absence system should be created to enable employees to voluntary

participate in a wide range of self-development activities or spontaneous international volunteer activities while securing their status without pay and without the need to work.

### **1. Self-development Leave System**

(1) When an employee requests a leave of absence for any of the following reasons, the appointing officer should be able to approve the request in consideration of his or her performance on duty, unless it causes any problems for the administration of public duty.

(i) Leave for Education in school

Taking an undergraduate, graduate or other course at a university in Japan or abroad.

(ii) Leave for international contribution activities.

Participating in an international contribution or other programs implemented by the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

(2) Period of leave: Not more than three years (two years in principle for school education) per leave

(3) Effect of leave: The employee secures his or her status without pay and without the need to work.

### **2. Effective Date**

The implementation should be effective within one year from the day of promulgation.

## **2. Trend of Working Hours**

In the working hour system for national public employees, the breathing period system was introduced in 1949 as part of the working hours to recover from light fatigue caused by the performance of duties and improve the efficiency of public services. However, according to results of a fact-finding survey of job-by-job pay rates in the private industry (administrative and managerial segments) conducted in 2004, only 5.7% of business establishments had such break period system during working hours (including establishments that have not set up a system but allow break time as a practice). Taking breathing period system during working hours is thus not prevalent among business establishments. Considering this, Rule 15-14 (Working Hours, Holidays, and Leave of Public Employees) was amended on March 3, 2006, and enforced on July 1, 2006. As a result of the amendment, the breathing period during working hours for regular services was abolished and the rest period was increased from 30 to 60 minutes

(45 minutes, as appropriate, considering duties, employees' health conditions, and welfare at each workplace).

### **3. Promoting Policies for Sound Mental Health**

The number of suicides among public employees has increased from a low of 96 people (per 100,000 people) in 1994 and stayed around 130 people for the past several years. The number decreased to 100 people in FY 2005 as a result of excluding approximately 70,000 employees of Specified Independent Administrative Institutions from the survey sample. However, the death rate (per 100,000 people) remains high. The number of those affected by mental or behavioral disorders among long-term absentees has increased rapidly, from 1,050 people (14.9% of the total) in 1996 to 1,912 people (29.0% of the total) in 2001.

Taking measures for sound mental health of public employees is an important issue for the public sector and the NPA released the "Guidelines for Sound Mental Health of Employees" (a notice issued by the Director-General of the Bureau of Remuneration and Employment Environment in 2004) as part of its efforts. In FY 2006, the NPA actively disseminated the report compiled by the "Expert Meeting on Mental Health Training" to raise awareness among the Cabinet Office and Ministries. The NPA also opened a back-to-work counseling room within itself in order to help long-term absentees due to mental or behavioral problems return to work smoothly and also to prevent recurrence.

### **4. Promoting and Utilizing the electronic of Procedures Related to Personnel and Remuneration**

In the government's "e-Japan Priority Policy Plan 2003" (decided by the IT Strategic Headquarters on August 8, 2003) and "e-Japan Priority Policy Plan 2004" (decided by the IT Strategic Headquarters on June 15, 2004), it was decided that the NPA would cooperate and coordinate with the Cabinet Office and relevant Ministries and develop the "Information System on Personnel and Remuneration-related Affairs", which will be utilized by the Cabinet Office and all the Ministries, based on the "Plan for Personnel and Remuneration Duties and System Optimization" decided by the Cabinet Office and Ministry Chief Information Officer (CIO) liaison meeting.

Following these decisions, the NPA developed the Information system on personnel and remuneration for regular service employees between FY 2003 and FY 2005 and introduced the system into the NPA itself in FY 2006.

The NPA unveiled the system and collected opinions and requests for improvement

between June and August 2006 in order to have persons in charge at the Cabinet Office and Ministries experience the system operation and compare between the personnel and remuneration operations actually carried out at the Cabinet Office and each Ministry and the scope of operations covered by the system.

Based on the above optimization plan, the NPA developed the system and promoted preparations to introduce it on the premise of “distributed” management where the Cabinet Office and each Ministry utilizes and manages the system independently. In August 2006, however, the Cabinet Secretariat expressed its opinion that it was necessary to review the system, including a shift to a so-called “centrally-controlled” form of management and utilization, to further improve effectiveness of the system.

In the light of these situations, the NPA set up a liaison conference comprised of Directors in charge of personnel and remuneration at the Cabinet Office and concerned Ministries and a working group comprised of persons in charge of practical duties after September 2006, jointly with the Cabinet Secretariat, in order to introduce the personnel and remuneration system smoothly. The NPA is currently conducting specific reviews of the method of system management and utilization, as well as measures to be taken in response to opinions and requests collected from the Cabinet Office and each Ministry.