



House of Representatives

General Assembly

File No. 428

January Session, 2021

House Bill No. 6344

House of Representatives, April 14, 2021

The Committee on Labor and Public Employees reported through REP. PORTER of the 94th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the bill ought to pass.

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF THE UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' ADVOCATE.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) The Labor Commissioner
2 shall, within available appropriations, establish the Office of the
3 Unemployed Workers' Advocate within the Labor Department to
4 provide assistance to individuals who are unemployed.

5 (b) The Office of the Unemployed Workers' Advocate may:

6 (1) Assist unemployed individuals seeking benefits administered by
7 the Labor Department under chapter 567 of the general statutes;

8 (2) Assist unemployed individuals to understand their rights and
9 responsibilities with respect to benefits administered by the department
10 under chapter 567 of the general statutes;

11 (3) Provide information to the public, state agencies, legislators and
12 others regarding the problems and concerns of unemployed individuals

13 and make recommendations for resolving such problems and concerns;

14 (4) Assist unemployed individuals with the filing of appeals in
15 connection with the benefits administered by the department under
16 chapter 567 of the general statutes;

17 (5) Analyze and monitor the development and implementation of
18 federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies relating to
19 unemployed individuals and recommend changes the office deems
20 necessary to the appropriate federal, state or local governmental entity;

21 (6) Receive and review complaints of unemployed individuals and
22 make recommendations to the commissioner for resolving such
23 complaints;

24 (7) Access prior employment records of an unemployed individual to
25 the extent permitted under state and federal law;

26 (8) Establish and maintain an Internet web site and a toll-free number,
27 or any other free calling option, to allow unemployed individuals access
28 to the services and information provided by the Office of the
29 Unemployed Workers' Advocate; and

30 (9) Take any other actions necessary to fulfill the purposes of this
31 section.

32 (c) Not later than July 1, 2021, the Labor Commissioner shall
33 designate an Unemployed Workers' Advocate, who shall serve at the
34 pleasure of the commissioner, to manage the daily activities and duties
35 of the Office of the Unemployed Workers' Advocate. The Unemployed
36 Workers' Advocate shall have the necessary qualifications to perform
37 the duties of said office, including, but not limited to, having expertise
38 and experience in the fields of unemployment compensation benefits
39 and advocacy for the rights of unemployed individuals. Within
40 available appropriations, the Unemployed Workers' Advocate shall
41 appoint and employ such assistants, employees and personnel as
42 deemed necessary for the efficient and effective administration of the
43 activities of the office.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>from passage</i>	New section

LAB *Joint Favorable*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 22 \$	FY 23 \$
Labor Dept.	GF - Potential Cost	Up to 566,475	Up to 579,705
State Comptroller - Fringe Benefits ¹	GF - Potential Cost	Up to 223,836	Up to 239,418

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact: None

Explanation

The bill, which requires the labor commissioner to establish the Office of the Unemployed Workers' Advocate, results in a potential cost of up to \$790,311 in FY 23 and up to \$819,123 in FY 23.

The bill requires the designation of an "unemployed workers' advocate" to manage the office's daily activities and duties, as well as appoint and employ the assistants, employees, and personnel needed to effectively and efficiently administer the office's activities.

The cost of the office and personnel are dependent on the way the requirements of the bill are satisfied. To the extent the agency hires all new, additional personnel to establish the office, there is a cost of up to \$765,811 in FY 22 and up to \$819,123 in FY 23 associated with salary and fringe benefit costs for up to seven positions (including the advocate position itself), as well as one-time information technology and office set-up costs estimated at up to \$24,500 in FY 22 only. However, to the

¹The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is 41.3% of payroll in FY 22 and FY 23.

extent that the agency is able to utilize existing personnel and equipment for some or all of the functions, the cost could be less.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation.

OLR Bill Analysis**HB 6344*****AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF THE UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' ADVOCATE.*****SUMMARY**

This bill requires the labor commissioner, within available appropriations, to establish the Office of the Unemployed Workers' Advocate within the Department of Labor (DOL) to assist unemployed people.

The bill requires the commissioner, by July 1, 2021, to designate an "unemployed workers' advocate," who serves at the pleasure of the commissioner, to manage the office's daily activities and duties. The advocate must have the qualifications needed to perform the office's duties, including expertise in unemployment benefits and advocacy for unemployed people's rights. The advocate must, within available appropriations, appoint and employ the assistants, employees, and personnel needed to effectively and efficiently administer the office's activities.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

OFFICE POWERS

The bill allows the Office of the Unemployed Workers' Advocate to:

1. help unemployed people seeking unemployment benefits;
2. help unemployed people understand their rights and responsibilities related to unemployment benefits;
3. provide information to the public, agencies, legislators, and others about unemployed people's problems and concerns, and make recommendations for resolving them;

4. help unemployed people file unemployment benefit appeals;
5. analyze and monitor the development and implementation of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies related to unemployed people, and recommend changes the office deems necessary to the appropriate governmental entity;
6. receive and review unemployed people’s complaints and make recommendations to the labor commissioner for resolving them;
7. access an unemployed person’s prior employment records to the extent that state and federal law allows;
8. establish and maintain an Internet website and a toll-free number, or any other free calling option, that allows unemployed people to access the office’s services and information; and
9. take any other actions needed to fulfill the bill’s purposes.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Labor and Public Employees Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 9 Nay 4 (03/25/2021)