

Labor and Public Employees Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-904

AN ACT CONCERNING THE LABOR DEPARTMENT'S EXECUTIVE

Title: DIRECTOR.

Vote Date: 3/23/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/4/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor and Public Employees Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This position has been vacant for a long time and it is expected that many trained /qualified DOL employees will be lost to retirement.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

KURT WESTBY, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

They support the proposed bill because it would make an essential position in the agency a classified position instead of unclassified. The law provides the Executive Director is appointed by the Labor Commissioner subject to the Governor's approval. This job has been vacant for quite some time and it is critical it be made permanent in preparation for significant challenges facing the agency. Many DOL retirements are expected in mid-2022 and a lot of institutional knowledge will be lost. This will move the UI technology forward, therefore it is necessary to make this position classified to ensure continuity.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

None submitted.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

BRIAN ANDERSON, LEGISLATIVE COORDINATOR, COUNCIL 4 AFSCME

The Department of Labor doesn't need more management. A new position, while AFSCME members struggle to catch up on a backlog and process claims is not something that should

be considered. Resources should be spent directly on serving the public by hiring people to process claims, hold hearings and answer the numerous calls and emails. This position has been vacant for years which proves it is not necessary to function. With a commissioner and two deputy commissioners already, adding a new position of executive director is redundant. They also urge any anticipated savings by not creating this position be used to hire frontline staff that are desperately needed for conducting business. The contact center has over 100 temporary staff that should be made permanent. Restore the taxes on the richest of our citizens and go back to the tax system similar to what was in place when our country prospered.

SAL LUCIANO, PRESIDENT, CT AFL – CIO

Since there are already two deputy commissioners, there are a number of career professionals at the department who collectively possess more institutional knowledge than any one person could. What they need is a significant investment in hiring frontline staff who can process unemployment benefits, investigate wage theft claims, enforce workplace health and safety standards, and perform other core functions. Rather than hiring sufficient staff to handle application processes related to Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the department entered into a no-bid agreement with Maximus Corporation to privatize the work. The no-bid contract siphoned taxpayer dollars to benefit an out-of-state corporation when CT residents need jobs. In-house employees, who are accountable to taxpayers, would have been a much better option. At a time of crisis like this, the state should be investing in their own people instead of boosting the profits of a billion-dollar corporation.

Reported by: Marie Knudsen, Assistant Clerk

Date: March 24, 2021