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August 16, 2010

Dear Members of the Senate Budget & Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present ideas for your consideration regarding the modernization of civil service. The New Jersey State AFL-CIO recognizes that improvements can constantly be made to government systems and programs, and we appreciate the opportunity to explain where we believe the civil service system is performing well, and where improvements can be made.

Recommendations have been made by the Governor and various legislators to allow local governments to terminate civil service completely. This would be a major mistake. Why? Because the core mission of civil service, its most basic reason for being, is to prevent political interference in hiring. Simply stated, for more than 100 years, our current civil service system has been successful in achieving this goal.

Civil service ensures equal opportunity for applicants for various government jobs based upon merit. This in turn rejects discrimination in hiring based on gender and race. Civil service is a core labor policy that was created to ensure public jobs are not subject to politics and patronage, which often leads to waste, inefficiency and fraud. New Jersey's civil service law is necessary to ensure certain promotional practices, discipline practices, hiring practices and other essential personnel matters are done according to their merits and qualifications, rather than being applied inconsistently or due to political interference. Ending civil service would jeopardize these long standing practices.

However, do we recognize that there are opportunities for improvement? Yes. Criticisms include the system sometimes being ridged or bureaucratic, and the problem most often cited - slow moving. We believe that these criticisms are the "exception," rather than the "norm." Particularly when you note the size of the system. According to the Civil Service Commission, the system governs approximately 500 jurisdictions, including counties, local governments, utility authorities, libraries, housing authorities, hospitals, social service boards, and boards of health, fire districts, school districts, and others. These jurisdictions cover approximately 107,000 employees.

Therefore, our recommendations are:

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First, modernization of the information exchange process is extremely important. One of the biggest criticisms from governments is that it takes too long to get necessary information, such as hiring lists, which often take between 30-45 days to receive. Although the website has made improvements, a significant amount of processing and information is still in paper form. A transition to electronic processing should be expedited.

Secondly, proper staffing is essential. One of the complaints we hear from both management and labor representatives, is that the processing of requests is extremely slow due to chronic understaffing. If we want improvements in turnaround time and increase efficiencies, we need to have the Civil Service Commission staffed and funded adequately. Budget numbers illustrate and reinforce this. In FY 2000, the Civil Service Commission had a staff of 435 and a \$28 million operating budget. Approximately 10 years later, the FY 2011 budget states the Commission now has 231 employees, and an \$18.5 million budget - these are significant reductions that must be addressed if we truly want to modernize the Commission. The continued defunding of the Commission has led to a growing backlog. According to the budget document, there will be approximately 3,588 pending written record appeals going into FY 2011. To put that backlog in perspective, it is anticipated that 4,300 total new appeals will be received in FY 2011, of which only 4,100 will be disposed that year, creating an ever expanding backlog.

Third, voluntary transfers from department to department can be expedited. Currently, an extended review process by the Intergovernmental Transfer Program is required. This program unnecessarily increases the bureaucracy for voluntary transfers, and should be reformed.

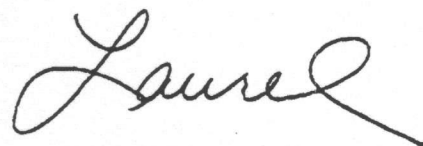
Fourth, in regard to disciplinary procedures, a streamlined executive branch disciplinary model was negotiated and implemented at the state level in 2007, which included a compacted time frame for appeals and an inclusion of a mandatory mediation process, which has led to a significant reduction in arbitration cases. This of course translates into cost reductions and faster administration. This should be encouraged through negotiations at a local government level. Since many of the same unions hold state executive branch and local government contracts, the improved disciplinary model at the state level can be bargained and modified for the local government level.

In closing, we recognize that improvements can be made in the civil service system. However, we strongly believe that it is accomplishing its main objectives, and therefore should not be eliminated.

Sincerely,



Charles Wowkanech
President



Laurel Brennan
Secretary-Treasurer