

Members of the Joint Finance Committee

Note: JFC rejected the Governor's proposal on legal services and giving the DOA Secretary the authority to abolish vacant positions..

May 4, 2009

Dear Senator /Representative:

The Association of Career Employees (ACE) is a professional association of state civil service employees. We advocate for state employees and for Wisconsin's historic civil service system.

There are several issues in the current budget of concern to ACE.

State Agency Attorneys

ACE opposes the Governor's proposal to consolidate some agency attorneys into the Department of Administration, and to provide unclassified chief legal counsel to large state agencies. It is critically important that each state agency continue to receive nonpartisan legal advice on the many specialized issues specific to various agencies. Consolidation will dilute the ability of attorneys to provide specialized advice, and unclassified appointments will likely politicize the legal process.

We have seen the problem at the federal Department of Justice when political considerations affect the selection of attorneys, and the deleterious impact on the legal advice provided in a politicized environment. We do not need to replicate this unfortunate model in Wisconsin.

Authority to Eliminate Vacant Positions

The Legislature has an important role to play in determining the budgets and personnel available to state agencies. ACE hopes that the Legislature will not permit the Executive Branch to usurp the Legislature's responsibility to participate in determining the appropriate staffing levels of state agencies.

While the current freeze on positions may have provided a short-term respite from layoffs, it has left major gaps in service that should not be made permanent just because certain positions became vacant at this time. If the state decides to cut positions, this process should be done in a deliberative manner based on priorities determined by both the Executive and Legislative branches of government. It should not be left up to the unelected Secretary of the Department of Administration.

State Benefits for Domestic Partners

ACE supports the provision of health and retirement benefits to the domestic partners of state employees. ACE supports this coverage because it is fair, and because it is needed for competitive reasons to recruit and retain state civil service employees and UW faculty.

The UW has lost grants exceeding the cost of providing coverage to UW partners because of the current policy. Major corporations and other governments that provide benefits to domestic partners have not experienced major increases in costs.

DOA Takeover of Human Resources Staff

ACE has been concerned for the last twenty-five years about efforts to politicize the civil service. There has been a gradual erosion of civil service protections.

In the early 1980's, the legislature agreed to strip civil service protection from the Administrator of the Division of Merit Recruitment and Selection in the Department of Employment Relations. Now the Director of the Office of State Employee Relations reports to the Secretary of the Department of Administration, often regarded as the chief aide to the Governor.

Moving agency personnel staff into DOA will not serve the missions of state agencies, and will strengthen the power of DOA's Secretary to influence hiring decisions. Legislators of both parties should resist decisions that strengthen the power of a Governor to exert political influence on civil service hiring decisions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert Jordan
Executive Director

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