

## Report Highlights

### Review of the Effectiveness of the Civil Service System in County Government

Senate Resolution 171 requires the LB&FC to examine whether the civil service system is an effective tool for counties in attracting and hiring the most qualified staff. All counties except Philadelphia, which has its own civil service system, currently use the state civil service system, primarily for their human services employees (about 13,000 positions, or 14% of all county employees).

#### Findings:

- **County participation in the state civil service system is optional.** Counties are required to use a merit-based personnel system to qualify for various federal and state funding, but it does not have to be the state civil service system. In practice, all counties except Philadelphia have contracts with the State Civil Service Commission (SCSC) to fulfill their merit system obligations. The Commission charges counties \$1.8 million annually for its services.
- **County officials report that the civil service system can be a significant impediment to their ability to hire high quality workers.** Frequently cited as “very negative” factors in the current system included: delays in the hiring process, which can often take 3 or more months; veterans’ preference; number of certified candidates; Rule of Three; and an over-reliance on written tests. Half (54%) reported that having their own system could result in improvements.
- **State funding agency, county practices and salary levels also contribute to the problem.** The civil service system is only one layer of a complex, multi-layered system:
  - Each state funding agency (the Departments of Aging, Health, and Public Welfare) has its own set of personnel rules and requirements.
  - Counties establish their own internal procedures; complying with union agreements and restrictions is yet another layer.
  - Perhaps most significantly, county and state officials report that low salaries and high case-loads are major impediments to local administrators’ ability to hire and retain employees.
- **Many counties provide drug/alcohol and aging services through private, nonprofit agencies that are not required to use the**

**SCSC.** Vacancy rates reported in these private agencies are significantly lower than in county agencies that use the civil service system.

- **The SCSC has taken various steps to facilitate county hirings and other civil service related transactions.** Several counties also noted the civil service system is a way to protect them from political influence in hiring decisions.
- **The U.S. General Accounting Office and others have cited the need for greater flexibility in personnel policies and practices to hire and retain a qualified, motivated workforce.**

#### Recommendations:

1. **The Governor’s Office of Administration, in conjunction with the SCSC, should create an intergovernmental, interagency policy group to address state/county personnel management issues.** This group should:
  - develop standards for counties that wish to adopt their own merit-based personnel systems;
  - develop suggestions for how counties could have greater flexibility within the current civil service system (e.g., scoring interviews or waiving written examinations);
  - enhance communication and consistency;
  - monitor SCSC county charges and costs; and
  - explore establishing a centralized hiring pool so caseworkers can be available for immediate employment.
2. **The General Assembly should reassess the policy of providing absolute preference to veterans.**
3. **The SCSC, state funding agencies, and county representatives should review the need for additional job classifications to meet county needs.**
4. **If a county remains unsatisfied with the SCSC’s requirements, the county should consider amending, or possibly terminating, its contract with the Commission.**