

Testimony
Senate State Government
April 16, 2018

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

Major General Anthony J. Carrelli

The Adjutant General

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Senate State Government Committee relative to Senate Bill (SB) 1037, amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, consolidating the Civil Service Act; providing for civil service reform in the areas of merit-based hiring, civil service applications, certifications, examinations and promotions; and making related appeals. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) fully embraces and supports this legislation. We seek to improve the hiring process so that it is consistent with other states, the federal government, and the private sector. This improved process will allow commonwealth agencies to compete for talent utilizing a more responsive standardized system and method of application; one that is user-friendly and representative of current real-time needs that garner an increased pool of viable applicants through vacancy-based job postings.

There are misconceptions as it relates to SB 1037. However, the only significant change within this bill is that the employment process, recruitment, and retention, would be transferred to the Office of Administration (OA).

SB 1037 does not change the current professions covered by merit-based hiring. Veterans' preference is preserved as currently outlined in Title 51; and the SCSC retains its current configuration of authority, maintains jurisdiction over appeals (including the power to conduct hearings and render decisions), retains authority to make decisions to exempt positions from Civil Service coverage, and remains responsible for auditing compliance within the merit system.

DMVA utilizes 207 job titles/classifications and 79 are civil service, which equals 38% civil service. That translates into 732 civil service employees out of our 2,462 or 28% of our employees. DMVA strongly advocates for our veteran population, and our agency is proud to report that our current complement of veterans stands at 14%. Our current list of veteran employees breaks down to 112 civil service veterans and 243 non-civil service veterans. As a percentage of our workforce, that represents 16.6% civil service veteran employees and 13.4% non-civil service veteran employees within DMVA.

DMVA firmly believes that to be more competitive, we must move to a more modern hiring process. Some examples of how the SCSC's outdated hiring system negatively impacts our ability to fulfill DMVA's mission include:

Nursing Administrator – Nursing Administrators ensure that the nursing care provided to the veterans who live at our six veterans' homes represents quality nursing care and meets all federal and state long-term care facility accreditation standards and professional nursing care standards. We attempted to fill a Nursing Administrator vacancy several times over a two-year period. Because no civil service eligibility list or examination existed for this job title, we were required to utilize lists for positions one pay grade lower, Nursing Services Consultant, and one pay grade higher, Nurse Manager 1, as comparable lists, without much success. The use of these comparable lists added significant time to the filling of a position vital to the care of the residents of our veterans' homes.

Volunteer Resources Coordinator – Volunteer Resources Coordinators serve a vital role in the well-being of the residents of our veterans’ homes. Over the past three years, they have facilitated over 84,000 volunteer hours in support of resident activities. They interview, evaluate and select volunteers, and coordinate volunteer activities to ensure enjoyable experiences for the residents of our homes. There have been two recent vacancies for Volunteer Resources Coordinators in the veterans’ homes. In both instances, the civil service eligibility list for this job title had very few candidates and we exhausted the list without finding a candidate. It wasn’t until we had already exhausted the standing lists that the SCSC would agree to utilize a “localized testing program,” which finally resulted in the successful filling of the positions. Throughout this process, one position was vacant for eight months; the other for five months.

Registered Nurse (RN) – RNs serve as “the front-line” providers of care to our veterans. Not only do they provide direct care to the veterans, they also oversee the care provided by Licensed Practical Nurses and Certified Nurse Aides. And, while all employers have difficulty filling RN positions, the outdated processes of the SCSC have added significant time and complexity that other employers don’t have to contend with. It is our understanding that, by using vacancy-based postings, we would see an improvement in the timeframes associated with hiring RNs with the implementation of NEOGOV. And, Act 69, signed into law in July 2016, gave the SCSC the ability to use vacancy-based postings. However, at this point, this important improvement has been ignored by the SCSC for 20 months.

For years, state, county, and local agencies have asked the Commission to modernize the merit system to improve the hiring, retention, and promotion of highly qualified individuals in order to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of government services. The Commission has been informed that its over-reliance on written exams and list-based hiring are disincentives to candidates who are used to applying for positions from their homes and receiving timely information on the status of the position they applied for. It appears that the Commission has begun to cooperate in efforts to modernize its operations. However, it also appears that they have only done so because of the threat of legislation. DMVA is concerned that if SB 1037 is not enacted, the Commission will revert to a lack of responsiveness to the need for modernization of the hiring process. This will result in agencies continuing to struggle to fill positions in a timely fashion, including positions critical to the health and well-being of our veterans.

In conclusion, we fully support SB 1037 and modernization of the Civil Service Act. SB 1037 showcases the Administration’s vision and takes “Government that works” to the next level by providing improved hiring processes; as well as demonstrating the shared collaborative responsibility of state agencies to work in mutual partnership for the benefit of all citizens; to include our veteran population. It is through this modernization that we can make it easier for all constituents to apply for jobs, allow vacancy-based hiring by having job seekers apply for jobs that they know are currently open, reinforce merit hiring principles, reduce hiring time, and reduce related costs.