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CENTER FOR RURAL PENNSYLVANIA

WILLIAMSPORT, PA

The problem of drug and alcohol abuse among our population is a significant workforce issue for Pennsylvania's employers.

--A consistent complaint of employers is an inability to find the people they need to fill the jobs available. This is not only those without the technical skills but those who cannot pass a drug or alcohol test.

--In April of 2013, we surveyed 464 Pennsylvania businesses regarding their ability to find qualified employees, their workforce requirements, and their workforce development initiatives. One of the questions we asked was "Which of the following best describes the personality or behavioral workforce requirements you are having difficulty filling?" One of the options for the respondents was "passing background checks" which includes the ability to pass a drug test. Thirty two percent of respondents cited passing background checks as one of the difficulties they are experiencing when trying to find qualified job applicants.

--More recently, last month the PA Manufacturers announced the results of a study they had done on this issue. They found that one out of every three applicants either refused to take a drug test or failed that test.

--One example from a northwest PA manufacturer

--over a three year period they lost 174 employees—almost a 100% turnover based on their number of FTEs. More than half (89) were terminated. Of that number more than 10% (10 individuals) were discharged over drug violations. The largest number (45 individuals) was in the category of attendance issues. Of course, it could be many of those had substance abuse issues as well.

--this same company, for a period of time, used a temp agency to secure workers. During one random test, one-half of the temp workers employed at that time (6 of 12) tested positive for drugs using a saliva test. Since that time, they have begun to use urinalysis or hair testing which is more accurate therefore the try number of those using may very well have been higher.

--This issues are exacerbated in 'zero tolerance' industries.

--Need for HB 1846

--As discussions begin to liberalize drug use policy in this state, we need to keep the very real concerns of Pennsylvania's employers in mind.