

Department of Labor



At A Glance

SHARON M. PALMER, Commissioner

Dennis C. Murphy, Deputy Commissioner

Established - 1873

Statutory authority - C.G.S. Sec. 31-1 to 31-403 (excluding chapter 568)

Central office - 200 Folly Brook Blvd., Wethersfield, CT 06109-1114

Average number of full-time employees - 834

Recurring operating expenses 2014-15: Federal - \$104,594,966; State - \$81,606,999

Capital Outlay: Federal - \$531,247; State - \$66,962; CEPF - \$70,267

Website - www.ct.gov/dol

Mission

The Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) is committed to providing the state's jobseekers and business community with services to strengthen our workforce and the economy.

Statutory Responsibility

The Connecticut Department of Labor meets the needs of workers and employers to become competitive in the global economy. For workers, this is accomplished through income support between jobs, assistance in searching for jobs, protection and fairness on the job, training programs, and information about the economy, wages and the workplace. Services offered to businesses include workplace data, labor market information, recruitment assistance, regional job

fairs, programs to help maintain and upgrade employee skills, such as apprenticeship and incumbent worker training, CONN-OSHA guidance and consulting services, and tax credit information. Informational services to workers and employers, as well as enforcement responsibilities include the payment of wages, health and safety, employment of minors, family and medical leave, representation by labor organizations, and resolution of labor disputes. As the Connecticut arm of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the agency collects, analyzes and disseminates workforce data to inform businesses, the general public, government planners and policymakers about employment issues and trends.

Public Service

Workforce Policy Advisors

- Through its *Office of Workforce Competitiveness* (OWC), CTDOL serves as the Governor's principal workforce development policy advisor. OWC works to coordinate employment, education and training programs and promote innovative strategies and ideas that will stimulate employment opportunities and job growth. OWC staff also provides technical assistance to the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC) whose members represent Connecticut businesses, employers, key state agencies, regional/local entities, organized labor, community-based organizations and other stakeholders.

Unemployment Insurance and Related Assistance

- *Unemployment Insurance* (UI) benefits are provided to unemployed persons pursuant to statute while claimants look for new work or take part in approved training programs. The agency offers two options for filing unemployment compensation claims – *WebBenefits*, an Internet system, and *TeleBenefits*, an automated voice system – both available in English and Spanish. *WebBenefits* gives claimants access to their benefit payment and the capability to print out the information. The online system also provides an appeals filing application for unemployment insurance decisions. Most individuals filing weekly unemployment claims use the Internet system.
- *Trade Adjustment Assistance* (TAA) helps individuals who are part of worker groups certified by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) whose jobs were believed to be affected by increased imports or a shift in production to a foreign country. To assist eligible workers return to suitable employment as quickly as possible, benefits include training; job search, relocation and readjustment allowances; health coverage tax credit; and wage subsidies for individuals 50 years of age and older who return to lower-paying work. TAA activity during the program year included:
 - *Worker group certifications*: Petitions filed on behalf of workers from 11 companies were approved, with the workers determined by USDOL to be adversely affected by

foreign trade and certified as eligible to apply for TAA; petitions filed on behalf of workers from five companies were denied.

- *Individual applications*: 432 individuals were identified by USDOL as potentially eligible to apply for TAA benefits and 286 eligibility determinations were issued in response to submitted applications.
- *Training*: 252 individuals entered TAA-approved training programs and 548 individuals were active in training. Training payments totaled \$2,649,822.
- *Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRA)*: A total of \$5,418,267 was paid for 11,124 weekly TRA claims, representing 3,581 weeks of basic TRA, 6,980 weeks of additional TRA, 246 weeks of remedial TRA and 317 weeks of completion TRA. Individuals who satisfy applicable program requirements may receive one or more types of TRA income support: up to 26 weeks of basic TRA; up to 52, 65, or 78 weeks of additional TRA, depending on the Trade Act petition number; and up to 26 weeks of remedial/completion TRA.
- *Reemployment/Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (R/ATAA)*: A total of \$294,860 in payments was issued to eligible workers.
- *Health Coverage Tax Credit (HCTC)*: The HCTC tax credit covered 72.5% of qualified health insurance premiums for eligible individuals and their families. This IRS program expired January 1, 2014, and the credit was not available during this program year.
- *Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN)* is a federal requirement that applies to Connecticut employers of 100 or more full-time workers to give 60-days advance notice of a plant closing or mass layoff if, over a 30-day period, they: (1) close a facility or discontinue an operating unit affecting at least 50 employees, not counting part-time workers, or (2) lay off 50-499 workers (and these workers comprise at least 33% of the total workforce at a single site of employment); or (3) lay off 500 or more workers at a single site of employment. Employers may also be required to provide 60-days advance notice if, over a 90-day period, they have had a series of smaller layoffs, none of which individually would be covered under WARN but which add up to numbers that would require a WARN notice. The law further requires that this notification be given to the appropriate local chief elected official, the Dislocated Worker Unit of the Department of Labor, and the collective bargaining representative of affected employees or each employee if the employees do not have such representation.
- The state's *Rapid Response Team*, headed by CTDOL, reaches out to Connecticut employers contemplating or experiencing plant closings, and exists to ease the impact of layoffs and to assure that workers are offered a full range of benefits and services. Prior to layoffs, the agency's Rapid Response staff conducts "*Early Intervention*" sessions where employees can learn about unemployment benefits, job search assistance, training opportunities and receive information about community services and local agencies that provide support to dislocated workers and their families. The Rapid Response Team

includes representatives from local Workforce Investment Boards and other assisting state agencies such as the departments of Economic and Community Development and Social Services.

From July 2014 to June 2015, the RR Team made 212 initial outreach calls regarding potential layoffs and responded to 28 WARN notices affecting 1,694 workers. The team made 47 employer and/or union visits and provided 63 presentations to 984 impacted workers, which included eight on-site job search and/or career planning workshops, one Trade Act benefit seminar, and 20 webinars for workers at companies that opted not to have on-site meetings.

Employment sites where face-to-face contact was not possible were provided packets of information, benefiting an additional 1,710 dislocated workers, including human resources managers and union representatives. An additional 292 webinar invitations were sent to workers who were part of large layoffs but whose employers declined on-site visits. As a means of increasing awareness of Rapid Response services, the team also helped staff 10 statewide job fairs and two company-specific job fairs, providing information to 3,010 jobseekers.

Rapid Response staff submitted five Trade Adjustment Assistance Act (TAA) petitions on behalf of workers whose jobs were believed to be affected by increased imports or a shift in production to a foreign country. Two of the five petitions, covering 22 workers, were certified TAA eligible. Three petitions were pending investigation at the close of the program year.

Employment and Training

- CTDOL's *Employment Services* (ES) program receives federal funding under the *Wagner-Peyser Act* to provide universal access to an array of labor exchange services. ES provides a variety of these services at *American Job Center* (AJC) locations throughout Connecticut, including job search assistance, referrals to jobs, placement assistance for jobseekers, reemployment services to claimants receiving unemployment insurance, and employee recruitment services to businesses with job openings.

At the AJC offices, 161,637 Wagner-Peyser program participants received services (staff-assisted or self-service) with a total of 153,515 staff-assisted services provided statewide. A total of 28,668 Wagner-Peyser customers benefited from employment services, including assistance with career choices and job searches; job search resources such as computers with Internet connection, phones, copiers and faxes; and workshops on résumé writing, interviewing and career exploration. Customers also received information about specific companies and labor market trends. In addition, 9,042 individuals received résumé services at CTDOL-sponsored events and the job centers. Résumé preparation services were provided by staff with board-certified credentials from the Professional Association of Résumé Writers.

- The *Online Labor Exchange* (www.CT.jobs) which is Connecticut's state labor exchange system, is a self-service job bank known as CT.jobs. This free service provides a range of employment services for jobseekers by helping to match them with potential employers based on qualifications, desired location, salary, and other criteria. Jobseekers can post their résumés online while employers can post W-2 jobs and search the résumé bank for qualified candidates. CT.jobs operates in alliance with US.jobs, the national labor exchange endorsed by the National Association of State Workforce Agencies. CT.jobs enables jobseekers to search thousands of employment opportunities representing all types of occupations, including Connecticut state agency jobs, and make inquiries regarding positions of interest. As part of a national labor exchange with other states, CT.jobs includes job listings from other states for jobseekers interested in relocating. Technical assistance is provided to both employers and jobseekers.

A total of 1,652 new account requests from businesses were processed by CT.jobs staff between July 2014 and June 2015. During this same period, employers posted 42,448 new Connecticut job openings and jobseekers placed 6,159 new résumés into the system. In addition, 112,260 jobs were indexed for greater user ease (indexing identifies links to jobs on corporate websites, which enables jobseekers to click on a job title and be taken directly to the job listing on the corporate website).

- *Jobs First Employment Services (JFES)* serves families receiving state cash assistance, Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), through the agency's partnership with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). During fiscal year 2014-2015, a total of 15,885 participants received employment services from *American Job Center* staff, or through contracted service providers. Services include job search assistance, vocational education, adult basic education, subsidized employment, case management and other support services such as transportation benefits.

In fiscal year 2014-2015, the "Integrated Basic Education and Job Skills Training (I-BEST)" pilot program continues to be available to JFES participants. I-BEST is an evidence-based model that provides technical skills training simultaneously with basic adult education. The curriculum was designed jointly and classes were co-taught by an adult education instructor and a specialist in the appropriate vocational technical field. The I-BEST model has proven to help participants improve their basic skills while attaining an industry-recognized credential. Several I-BEST pilot programs include a post-program subsidized employment component.

- *STRIDE (Skills, Transitional Support, Respect, Integrity, Direction, and Employment)*: Through an agreement with the state's Community Colleges, CTDOL funds Quinnebaug Valley Community College's STRIDE re-entry program to provide transitional support services to incarcerated and paroled individuals. The program offers job readiness, job search and job placement assistance and provides services designed to support self-sufficiency and the successful re-integration into the community including:
 - 10-week pre-release classroom instruction and case management
 - Assessment of job entry and job retention skills

- Linkage to community-based resources for transitional supports
 - Transportation for job-related activities
 - Overview and navigation of American Job Center (AJC) services
 - Encouragement to pursue continuing education through adult education or the CT Community College system
 - Connections to training or internships
 - Assistance with on-line job searches
 - Post-placement support
- Nine Connecticut Career Fairs were offered this past fiscal year, including a veteran-specific Heroes4Hire Job Fair co-sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as a DiverseAbility fair focused on hiring individuals with disabilities. The fairs drew 454 company recruiters and 5,850 jobseekers. The events also included no-cost résumé-writing critiques and assistance provided by trained résumé staff at the Labor Department. Employers are not required to report hires as a result of the job fairs; however, exit surveys from jobseekers and employers indicate that companies are highly satisfied with the caliber of candidates attending these events while jobseekers have noted that employers have hired them at the event or set up additional interviews.
 - CTDOL's *Alien Certifications Program* located within the Performance and Accountability Unit acts as an agent for USDOL. The program ensures that employers have exhausted all efforts to hire American workers before recruiting foreign workers prior to receiving certification. In fiscal year 2014-2015, CTDOL staff handled 57 certifications, including temporary certifications for foreign agricultural workers (H-2A). A total of 52 pre-occupancy housing inspections in connection with agricultural certifications were also completed.
 - The *Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers* program provided outreach services to 512 workers, including information on available workforce services, referrals to healthcare providers, and related supportive services. Agricultural employers received recruitment assistance, mediation, interpreter services, and technical guidance on compliance with the Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker regulations.
 - The *Office of Apprenticeship Training* administers Connecticut's Registered Apprenticeship system, which is supported by the state's general fund, industry support from registration fees, and two federally-funded grants. Based on an employer-employee relationship, Registered Apprenticeship offers individuals the opportunity of "learning while earning." Registered Apprenticeship is a long-term (typically three to four years) structured training strategy that combines on-the-job training with classroom-related instruction to prepare skilled workers for Connecticut industry. Currently 1,575 active employer-sponsors and 5,800 registered apprentices are in the program and an additional 500 apprentices will complete their training this year.

The Office of Apprenticeship Training provides registration, monitoring, technical assistance and consulting services for the administration of apprenticeship agreements per state regulations and standards. The office also qualifies employers for tax credits, works

with the Department of Education, Department of Consumer Protection and other state agencies, and performs outreach to veterans, employer groups, and many community-based organizations to promote Registered Apprenticeship in Connecticut. The office continues its efforts to expand registered apprenticeship within the manufacturing sector. To further this effort, the Manufacturing Innovation Fund, a new program funded by the Department of Economic and Community Development and administered by CTDOL's Office of Apprenticeship Training, has set aside nearly \$8 million to subsidize wages, classroom instruction, and credentialing for apprentices registered by manufacturers after July 1, 2015. The total subsidy per apprentice for two years is \$18,750 with sponsors able to subsidize up to five apprentices per year under the program.

- *Job Corps* is a national, federally funded educational and vocational training program administered by USDOL that helps low income youth (ages 16-24) gain workplace skills, train for high-demand occupations, and become independent and self-sufficient. With centers in Hartford and New Haven, more than 400 students enroll each year to earn a high school diploma or GED, learn a trade, obtain third party certifications and receive assistance finding a good job. CTDOL has an assigned staff member who provides on-site support to the Hartford Job Corps Academy and New Haven Job Corps Center.

Veterans' Services

- *Office for Veterans' Workforce Development (OVWD)* helps Connecticut veterans through its team of Veterans' Employment Representatives located at *American Job Centers*, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offices, and various outstations throughout the state.
 - During the year, employment and training services were provided to more than 6,800 veterans. In partnership with both the state and federal Department of Veterans Affairs and the Connecticut Military Department, demobilization services were also provided to returning troops from the CT National Guard and U.S. Armed Service Reserves.
 - In April 2015, OVWD sponsored a *Heroes4Hire* job fair, that featured 95 employers and was attended by more than 1,300 veterans. In addition to having the chance to meet with representatives from companies with job openings, veterans were provided information on veterans' benefits, vocational rehabilitation, résumé critique assistance, education and career options, and career development guidance.
 - OVWD staff continued its work with the Oasis Centers program, which is operated through Connecticut's Board of Regents for Higher Education. Oasis Centers are located on the campuses of Connecticut universities and state community colleges, offering a place where veterans can gather and meet with state and federal benefit providers. OVWD staff provides veterans with labor market information and offers assistance with occupational exploration, research into education options, résumé and cover letter preparation, interviewing skills, and employment searches.
 - A pilot program connecting the OVWD and Department of Social Services (DSS) was put into motion at the Waterbury *American Job Center* to expedite services to veterans

who meet criteria for cash assistance, SNAP and other potential benefits. The pilot program went very well all goals were accomplish. As a result, a pilot in the Bridgeport AJC office was established and a hotline for veterans was established. Additionally, a new online link was developed and posted on CTDOL's website (www.ctvetsjobs.com) and the DSS website to further streamline wait time for veterans receiving assistance.

- The VETS 2 COPS and VETS 2 FIREFIGHTERS program, launched in November 2012, continues to assist veterans interested in continuing careers in law enforcement and as first responders. This fiscal year, 15 veterans were hired as police officers, 25 assigned slots at the academy for training, and six hired for federal correctional positions. The program consists of two components: (1) a workshop for veterans on how to apply for jobs in the field of fire and police and (2) outreach to police and fire departments to educate about the program and assist with the hiring process.
- In September 2015, veterans in need were provided services by OVWD staff at Stand Down. This event, held at the State Veterans' Home in Rocky Hill, offered opportunities for veterans who are homeless, chronically unemployed, or have difficulty adjusting in society. CTDOL services included résumé writing assistance, online job search guidance and registration for employment services.
- Transitioning services were also provided by OVWD staff to Connecticut's National Guard and Army Reserve troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. At four demobilization briefings, services were provided to more than 150 Army, Marines, Sailors and Airman. Services included information and referrals to benefits and federal training programs, and education, and employment programs offered through the *American Job Centers*. Unemployment information was also provided to those discharged from active military service. OVWD staff participated in numerous 30, 60 and 90 day follow-ups with these units and their families. This important transitioning process for retuning troops is accomplished through the joint efforts of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, CTDOL's veterans' staff, CT Department of Veterans' Affairs, USDOL, and the Connecticut Military Department.
- The Subsidized Training and Employment Program (Step Up), expanded by the Legislature to allow all unemployed veterans to take part in the wage subsidy and training program (previously, the program was only available to post 9-11 combat veterans) is part of the original Step Up program created under the Jobs Bill of 2011. Through marketing and employer outreach events, the "Step Up for Vets" program has provided 257 employers the opportunity to hire 436 veterans using state funding to help subsidize the positions for up to six months.

Reemployment Services for Unemployment Insurance Claimants

- The *Enhanced Reemployment Services* (ERS) program seeks to identify unemployment insurance claimants who are likely to exhaust their benefits, are unlikely to return to their previous occupations, and will typically need job search assistance services to make a successful transition to new employment. Recipients of Unemployment Insurance benefits

are required to register with Employment Services as a condition of eligibility for compensation.

Orientation sessions were conducted for 7,434 ERS participants who received labor market information, career guidance, information on CT jobs, an overview of *American Job Center* services, and details on unemployment insurance benefit rights and responsibilities. Many of these claimants also benefited from more direct, individual employment services and training, which resulted in 20,803 additional reemployment services being provided.

- Staff-assisted reemployment services were provided to 21,898 UI claimants. These individuals were provided job information and assistance, as well as information about specific companies and labor market trends.

Web-Based Services

- From July 2014 to June 2015, more than 3.5 million people visited the agency website, and approximately 1.4 million of these visits consisted of searches for information related to Unemployment Insurance benefits. 72,224 visitors accessed information pertaining to youth employment and 181,759 obtained information on job seeking skills. Additionally, 12,562 sought employer recruitment information; and 11,496 were interested in veterans' services.
- An average of 24,632 claimants (45%) used the Web function to file for their weekly UI payments.
- The *Connecticut Job & Career Connection (JCC)* received 90,368 visitors from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015. The JCC site provides job descriptions, education and training requirements for each job category, wage information and employment projections for nearly 800 occupations. Included in the JCC is the VETCENTRAL website, which allows military veterans to find similar civilian occupations by military code, rank, or branch of service.
- More than 32,051 visitors made use of the agency's *Connecticut Education & Training Connection* over the past year. It serves as a leading online source of information on education and training in the state that provides access to thousands of training programs and courses.

Workplace Guidance and Safety

- The *Wage and Workplace Standards Division* recovered \$6,136,111.56 in owed wages for Connecticut workers this year. The Division enforces approximately 160 state statutes and administers a wide range of workplace laws, including the minimum wage (currently \$9.15 per hour; \$9.60 effective Jan. 1, 2016 and \$10.10 effective Jan. 1, 2017 (see P.A. 14-1), overtime laws, wage payment laws, prevailing wage, employment of minors, Family and Medical Leave Act, and misclassification of workers as independent contractors to

avoid workers' compensation requirements. Requests for wage recovery assistance have escalated due to a challenging economy, and have led to additional complaints filed and an increasing number of cases of non-payment and failure to pay minimum wage or overtime.

- *State Board of Labor Relations* defines and protects the statutory rights of employees including the right of public employees to form, join, or assist labor organizations. The Board also encourages and protects the right of employees and employers to bargain collectively and remedies certain practices on the part of employees and employers that are detrimental to the collective bargaining process and to the general public. More than 80 percent of the cases filed with the State Board of Labor Relations are resolved short of a Board hearing, largely due to successful mediation efforts of Assistant Agents.
- *State Board of Mediation and Arbitration* provides mediation and arbitration services to employers and employee organizations in the public and private sector. The objectives of the Board are to save jobs by maintaining peaceful employer/employee relations and to promote equity between labor and management by resolving labor disputes.
- *Connecticut Occupational Safety and Health Division (CONN-OSHA)* enforces health and safety standards in public sector workplaces by conducting safety inspections, responding to complaints or requests, and investigating fatalities and serious accidents. Citations are issued where violations are discovered. Safety training and onsite safety and health consultations are provided to private and public sector employers on request, and the division offers no-cost technical assistance and information services on workplace hazards. The statistics unit collects data and provides information on workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities that occur in Connecticut.
- The *Office of Program Policy* provides legal counsel to the agency, technical assistance in unemployment insurance matters to agency adjudicators, and written opinions and verbal guidance in complex cases. Staff also provides training in unemployment compensation statutes, regulations, case law and the adjudication process and represent the Unemployment Compensation Administrator in hearings and related proceedings before the Employment Security Appeals Division and the Employment Security Board of Review.

In 2014-2015, Program Policy staff issued decisions in 298 individual unemployment compensation cases and 48 multi-claimant cases. More than 80 appeals, written arguments or motions were submitted to the Board of Review and Appeals Referees. Staff conducted training sessions on unemployment insurance law and policy for CTDOL's Benefits Accuracy and Measurement unit while Call Center employees were trained on unemployment insurance law and adjudication issues. Office attorneys handled Freedom of Information requests, FMLA complaints, and retaliation cases that concerned complaints filed by individuals under three retaliation statutes – wage retaliation, unemployment compensation retaliation, and public-sector OSHA retaliation.

- Cooperating with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the *Office of Research* collects, analyzes and delivers information on the state's labor market. Information is collected and

disseminated on employment levels, unemployment rates, wages and earnings, estimates of available labor, employment projections, business staffing patterns, and career planning information. Employers, career counselors, educators, economic developers, training program planners, policy makers, economists and the general public use the information.

The *Office of Research* also produces the *Labor Situation* report and partners with the Department of Economic and Community Development to produce the *Economic Digest*. The *Labor Situation* provides a monthly and over-the-year snapshot of the state's industry sectors and unemployment rate. Monthly estimates are later revised, using actual employer records. The *Economic Digest*, published each month, provides comprehensive and timely data and articles on the state's workforce and economy.

- The *Employment Security Appeals Division* conducts appeal hearings from decisions granting or denying unemployment compensation benefits through two levels of appeal. The first level (Referee Section) decided 17,275 appeals while the second level (Board of Review) decided 1,896 appeals. This year, the Referee Section and the Board of Review continued to exceed the federally-mandated quality standards in issuing its decisions. In 2014, the Appeals Division implemented a web-based scheduling system that allows for the streamlining of the hearing notice process by centralizing the scheduling, maintenance, and monitoring of unemployment appeal hearings.

Employer Services

- Business Services helps Connecticut's employers to hire, train and retain workers by analyzing the needs of businesses and customizing solutions. Between July 2014 and June 2015, Business Services staff assisted employers with more than 552 employee recruitments attended by approximately 7,559 jobseekers.

The Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) Program provides employers with resources needed to invest in the state's workforce by upgrading employee skills, thereby helping businesses to remain competitive and avert layoffs. Employers are required to provide a 50% or greater match for each of these training programs, which included training in manufacturing, allied health, green technology, and other industries. This year, CTDOL provided approximately \$750,000 in Incumbent Worker Training funds to 78 Connecticut employers with 3,609 employees participating in these trainings. While Incumbent Worker Training Program legislation requires that a minimum of 50% of the Incumbent Worker Training funds go to new employers, CTDOL surpassed this requirement and expended 83% of the funds with new employers, far surpassing the legislative requirement.

- The *Tax Division* administers an equitable unemployment insurance tax program that protects both workers and employers through the fair enforcement of the Unemployment Compensation law.
 - Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits paid to unemployed workers totaled \$716 million. Of that amount, \$660.5 million was paid to claimants formerly employed by employers paying quarterly UI taxes under the regular UI benefits program, and \$55.5

million was provided to claimants formerly employed by non-taxable employers and/or under other programs. Total taxes paid by more than 100,000 employers whose employees were covered by Unemployment Insurance totaled \$814 million.

- The Tax Division also ensures that all workers providing services in Connecticut are properly classified either as employees or as bona fide independent contractors. Workers who are misclassified as independent contractors can experience a loss of certain employment protections such as unemployment compensation benefits, workers' compensation coverage, no overtime pay, pay below minimum wage, and often a job without health benefits. Further, when companies intentionally misclassify workers as independent contractors rather than as employees, this creates an unfair business climate. Law-abiding employers cannot compete against those employers who intentionally undercut them by not paying all taxes and benefits for workers, and do not pay lawful employment-related taxes on workers – resulting in higher taxes for those employers that follow the law. Information about misclassification from Connecticut's Joint Enforcement Commission on Employee Misclassification is available online to assist employers in the proper classification of their workers.
- *Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)* program provides a federal tax credit for employers hiring individuals from specified groups. A total of 3,803 tax credit certifications were granted between October 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015. Authorization to grant WOTC to all specified groups expired on December 31, 2014 and is awaiting federal re-authorization.
- *Shared Work* guidelines were expanded in 2013-2014 to offer an outstanding resource to additional Connecticut companies and their employees. The program provides partial unemployment benefits to eligible workers, thus offering companies facing tough economic conditions an alternative to layoffs. Employers can remain open, and retain skilled workers at reduced hours because employees temporarily work a reduced workweek, with the lost portion of their salary supplemented by partial unemployment compensation benefits. Additional information on program initiatives can be found under the *Grants and Improvements/Achievements* sections.
- The *Lean Government Process Improvement* program continues to actively promote its services to state agencies and organizations. The program, which consists of formal classroom training and group sessions, works in a team setting to map out work processes, identify customer values, and find ways to slash waste. The goal of CTDOL's Center for Lean Government is to promote increased productivity, fewer errors and improve quality by eliminating unnecessary reports and paperwork and streamlining approval processes and information retrieval.

Grants and Awards

Grants

- *Shared Work*: CTDOL was awarded \$1.2 million funds from the federal DOL in January 2015 to (1) enhance and improve the program's technology and programming used to

administer this unemployment insurance program and (2) develop outreach materials and activities to help promote the program to Connecticut's employers.

Shared Work is designed to save jobs and retain skilled workers by temporarily reducing employee hours and supplementing their lost wages with the help of partial unemployment benefits. Under the program guidelines, when a company's business climate improves, employees resume their regular hours and employers are able to ramp up quickly with a full team of experienced employees in place.

The grant is also funding employer outreach events and presentations. A variety of informational materials, including brochures, tip sheets and mailers, as well as a video and new website have been developed. Outreach will include informational workshops with PowerPoint presentations for both employers and employees to help explain the benefits of Shared Work. Materials can be found at the new web address:

www.sharedworkct.com.

- *Unemployment Insurance Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (UI REA)*: CTDOL was awarded a federal grant of \$2,058,670 in 2013 for UI REA, a program that addresses the individual reemployment needs of selected UI claimants while also helping to prevent and detect UI improper payments. CTDOL continued development efforts this year and is preparing for a September 2015 implementation. In its first year, UI REA will provide 7,500 UI claimants with intensive employment services. As a condition of continuing eligibility for benefits, selected claimants are required to report for an in-person meeting at a designated *American Job Center (AJC)* for an orientation to AJC services; registration with the state's job bank; access to labor market and career information specific to the claimant's job skills and employment prospects; an assessment of the claimant's needs and appropriate referrals to re-employment services or training; development of an individualized reemployment plan to expedite a return to work; and an unemployment insurance eligibility review and referral to adjudication if an eligibility issue or potential issue is raised.
- *Connecticut Green Jobs Funnel Initiative*: CTDOL's three-year, \$5.8 million grant, awarded by the USDOL in July 2011, is used to administer the *Connecticut Green Jobs Funnel Initiative*. Managed by the Department's Office of Workforce Competitiveness, the goal was to promote career pathways in the green construction industry for unemployed and underemployed workers in seven Connecticut communities. The initiative enhanced and replicated the evidence-based Jobs Funnel pre-apprenticeship model with core services that included assessment; case management, support services, basic and technical skills training, and job placement and retention support. The project ended in June 2015, served a total of 1,548 individuals and secured 1,087 job placements. The program surpassed its goal by more than 150% overall, providing training to many more participants than planned and awarded approximately 189% more credentials than projected.
- *The Jobs Funnel Initiative*: Comprised of public-private joint efforts around the state, the program places unemployed and underemployed individuals in a variety of employment opportunities including construction and non-construction jobs in both union and non-

union settings and apprenticeship training programs. The Funnel partnerships have placed more than 4,000 individuals into jobs since their inception.

- *Disability Employment Initiative:* In October 2013, Connecticut was one of eight states to receive a grant under USDOL's Disability Employment Initiative (DEI). Awarded to CTDOL's Office of Workforce Competitiveness, the three-year, \$3,058,706 grant implements strategic approaches for enhanced employment services to individuals with disabilities in the public workforce investment system.

Disability Resource Coordinators establish key partnerships across multiple workforce and disability service systems, coordinate services, and leverage funding to meet the needs of job seekers with disabilities in the *American Job Centers*, as well as assess and recommend solutions to physical, programmatic or communications accessibility workplace barriers. Working with DEI Case Managers, jobseekers with disabilities receive a full range of employment assistance including assessments, career readiness skills, training and education.

As a requirement of the DEI, two local Workforce Investment Boards – Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board and Capital Workforce Partners – became active Employment Networks in the Social Security Administration's *Ticket to Work* Program, thus expanding the Connecticut workforce investment system's capacity to serve eligible beneficiaries. The DEI also required the state's participation in an evaluation process to measure the impact of the project on outcomes for jobseekers with disabilities. Random assignments were made to identify pilot and comparison Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIAs) under the grant. The North Central and Northwest LWIAs are participating as the pilot regions, and the Eastern and Southwest LWIAs are participating as the comparison regions.

The DEI grant provides for capacity building efforts to serve jobseekers with disabilities through extensive staff training. Over the year, *American Job Center* staff received training on disability awareness and etiquette, universal design, cognitive limitations, mental health, American Sign Language, and deafness and deaf culture. Up-to-date assistive technology has been purchased and installed for the American Job Centers under the grant. Through the DEI, CTDOL collaborated with several state agencies and community organizations on the first of four planned career fairs under the grant. The "Diverse Ability Career Fair" was held in Rocky Hill in April 2015 with 48 employers and 600 jobseekers participating. Employers were seeking to fill entry-level to advanced positions in a variety of industries, such as manufacturing, finance, healthcare, transportation, distribution, and education. A second Diverse Ability Career Fair is planned in Waterbury for October 2015.

- In June 2014, CTDOL's Office of Research was awarded a three-year grant under the USDOL Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI). This \$823,791 grant is being used to coordinate CTDOL's workforce training, Jobs First Employment Services, unemployment insurance benefits, unemployment insurance wages and other related databases into a unified system that can link with the education database system. The goal is to assist

researchers in these agencies better understand the links between Connecticut's education system, workforce training system, and successes in the labor market.

- **Dislocated Worker Grants:** During the 2014-2015 fiscal year, the agency administered grants awarded by the USDOL to serve dislocated workers under its Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Program. These are as follows:

National Emergency Grants (NEG):

- *Sector Partnership National Emergency Grant:* On June 26, 2015, CTDOL was awarded \$3,889,995 grant to partner with its local Workforce Investment Boards for regional planning to identify new or growing employment opportunities, sector strategies for building talent pipelines, and enhanced employment and training services for dislocated workers. The grant period is July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2017.
- *Job-driven strategies program:* CTDOL was awarded \$3,392,350 to implement a job-driven strategies program for dislocated workers, particularly the long term unemployed. CTDOL's Office of Apprenticeship Training (OAT) and three local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) – the Northwest Regional WIB, the Eastern CT WIB, and Workforce Alliance – provide services under this grant. The grant began on July 1, 2014 and as of June 30, 2015, the OAT registered 22 manufacturing employers as apprenticeship sponsors while the WIBs served 46 dislocated workers. Of those workers, 46 received intensive re-employment services, 41 enrolled in occupational skills training (of which, 27 entered on-the-job training), and three entered on-the-job-related employment following provided services.
- *North Central Multi-Company:* CTDOL was awarded \$420,518 to provide employment and training services to 100 workers displaced from 10 different companies located in the region served by the North Central Workforce Investment Board/Capital Workforce Partners (CWP). Under the grant, which ran from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2015, CWP served 105 displaced workers. All 105 received intensive re-employment services, 31 enrolled in occupational skills training, and 80 entered employment (67 full-time and 13 part-time) following provided services.

Awards

- *SIDES:* In 2014 CTDOL was awarded approximately \$1.06 million in federal funds to install a system to expedite the process of verifying employer separation information through the use of Separation and Information Data Exchange System (SIDES). Project implementation is scheduled for fall of 2016. Web services enable electronic communication and transmission of unemployment insurance (UI) separation information between UI agencies and large multi-state employers or third party administrators. Funds

also will be utilized to implement an employer website to provide separation and wage information electronically for small- to medium-size employers who do not exchange information with the SIDES web services. CTDOL will benefit with operational, postage and handling cost savings; standardized questions will result in improved quality of adjudications reports and decisions and, as a result of expedited data exchange, employers have the ability to protest or appeal cases more quickly.

- *Integrity:* In 2014 CTDOL received \$115,254 in federal funds to automate a current manual process to prevent improper benefits based on a nation cross match of the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) and current Connecticut claimants filing for benefits. Implementation is scheduled for 2016. On average, 400 cases result from the cross match and prevents an estimated loss of \$12,480,000 to the unemployment trust fund and improving the integrity of the UI payment process.
- *Fraud Prevention:* CTDOL received \$500,000 in federal funds in 2014 to continue the Unemployment Compensation Fraud Prosecution Unit. This partnership combines the resources of the Connecticut Department of Labor and Chief State's Attorney's Office to fight fraud by tracking down and prosecuting offenders for collecting unemployment compensation benefits to which they were not entitled and to help maintain the state's unemployment insurance trust fund by discouraging those who are trying to cheat the system. The partnership has resulted in establishment of the Unemployment Compensation Fraud Unit in the state's Division of Criminal Justice. Two inspectors and a prosecutor work with CTDOL to identify cases of deliberate fraud and then obtain arrest warrants following a thorough investigation. In June 2015, the partnership announced its 100th arrest in combating unemployment insurance fraud. At that time, the program had recouped more than \$800,000 for the state's trust fund and its action have served as an effective deterrent to those contemplating UI fraud.
- *Workforce Investment Act (WIA):* CTDOL received \$27.5 million in federal funding to provide quality workforce services to approximately 6,100 individuals, and to help Connecticut's workforce investment partners increase the availability of employment and training assistance – an important component to the economic recovery of the state. The CTDOL and the Workforce Investment Boards use the funds to develop new employment and training initiatives to promote employment opportunities that show the best potential for job growth, and fund projects designed to strengthen Connecticut's workforce and businesses.
- *Individual Development Accounts (IDAs):* Since it began in 2000, \$5,419,363 has been administered by CTDOL. The program helps create self-sufficiency, enhance careers and build assets. IDAs are matched savings accounts designed to help low-income individuals and families save money to purchase assets. Since the IDA program began, CTDOL has received \$907,500 in federal funding, \$2,725,250 in state-appropriated funds, \$600,000 in Connecticut Housing Trust Funds, and \$1,186,613 in contributions from financial institutions and/or community action agencies.

CTDOL has administered four federal Assets for Independence Act grants, two Housing Trust Fund initiatives and three Connecticut Individual Development Accounts (IDA) initiatives to provide 962 Individual Development Accounts statewide, resulting in 407 asset purchases to date.

Outreach Efforts/Public Education/New Publications

- The agency's Communications unit continues to develop a growing web presence for the agency by refining and expanding CTDOL's *Facebook* and *Twitter* social networking/media sites. Efforts to increase social media awareness include web banners, active tweets, and inviting state policymakers to visit CTDOL's Facebook page. The unit expanded its public outreach and education efforts to a diverse, technology-savvy population through an increasing number of electronic flyers, newsletters, publications and websites.
- The agency's *Speaker's Bureau* includes a diverse pool of agency experts available for public speaking engagements on topics and issues within the agency's jurisdiction. Topics include employment law, worker health and safety, labor market information, hot jobs, résumé writing, job interview tips and techniques, workforce development, and unemployment insurance. Requests are made via telephone, fax, or by using the agency website. Approximately 250 speaking requests are handled each year by a CTDOL's subject matter experts.
- *CONN-OSHA* staff continued its monthly Employer Roundtable Discussion series of free events featuring guest speakers, panel discussions and an overview of state and federal safety and health regulations for the workplace. The discussion series is held on the third Tuesday of every month and continues to grow, with participation averaging 40 attendees per event.
- The 21th *Connecticut Learns and Works* consortium, an annual education and workforce development conference, was attended by 270 participants. The goal is to showcase innovative ideas and practices that can be used in the classroom, in training venues, and to promote cutting-edge technology. The May 15, 2015 program offered eight different workshops focusing on education collaboration with present day workforce needs. Tailored to counselors, educators, case managers, employment and training professionals, job developers, recruiters and private sector business, topics included career pathways, manufacturing employment, training opportunities, social media usage, Labor Market Information, and STEM initiatives for young women in middle schools.

Improvements/Achievements 2014-15

Increased Efficiencies

Website Improvements:

- Decision documents pertaining to the Connecticut State Board of Labor Relations decision documents are now searchable online. The decisions, which date back from 1945 to the present day, serve as a valuable resource for CTDOL staff, attorneys and the general public.
- The website, www.FileCTui.com, developed to provide customers an alternative to waiting on the phone for answers to commonly-asked questions, has been in service since November 2013. Since that time, more than 1.65 million individuals have used the site. While many utilized the FAQs section, 21,228 online requests have been made through the site, averaging 932 online requests per month. This alleviates the need for a claimant to wait 15 minutes to an hour to speak with a Customer Service Representative to change a security pin, change an address, report return to work status, change tax withholding status, or catch up a missed continued weekly claim. Customers avoid the wait times with a quick click of a mouse and have a response within 24 hours.
- Enhancements were made to the Connecticut Occupational Safety and Health (CONN-OSHA) area of the Department of Labor's website this year. The customer-friendly improvements included the addition of the "Breakfast Roundtable Discussion Group" section to the CONN-OSHA site to complement the CONN-OSHA discussion groups held each month. This new feature allows users to view in detail the subject area to be discussed in the coming month, as well as to access information on all present and past discussion groups. An additional improvement was to add the CONN-OSHA Hazard Communication/GHS Employer Training Program to the site.

Technology Improvements:

- *DirectBenefits:* CTDOL's paperless payment system for unemployment insurance benefits is currently saving approximately \$83,000 per month. CTDOL currently issues about 44,500 payments weekly, and this saves on printing, mailing and re-issuing lost checks.
- *Unemployment Insurance Tax Filing:* New legislation effective January 1, 2014 requires that employers make their unemployment insurance (UI) payments electronically, saving the agency more than \$200,000 annually on data entry costs associated with the recording of UI tax, wage and payment data submitted in paper form. The elimination of data entry costs allows CTDOL to reallocate staff to other priority functions, including delinquent tax collections and enforcement activities. Employers, who can make waiver requests for certain circumstances, are finding it easy to access the CTDOL website to file returns and make payments free of charge.
- *Social Security Verification:* CTDOL implementation in May 2013 of a batch process that verifies every Social Security number through the Social Security Administration database has now prevented an estimated \$10 million in improper UI payments.

- *Monetary Penalty:* Unemployment insurance integrity laws (required by federal mandate) were enacted October 2013 to change administrative penalty weeks to a monetary penalty when an individual fraudulently claims UI benefits. Program modifications and LEAN initiatives were implemented in April 2014 to support the new integrity laws and since that time, fraud investigators/auditors completed over 44,000 cases that allowed them to identify more than \$51 million in overpaid UI benefits for recoupment action.
- *Return-to-Work Crossmatch:* Utilizing employer-submitted “New Hire or Rehire” information, hundreds of cases are reviewed each week for fraudulent activity. This prevention program diminishes opportunities to fraud the unemployment insurance program and prevents approximately \$5 million in improper payments each year.
- *Surveillance Capability:* This partnership with Connecticut employers began in June 2011 and involves surveillance operators capturing employment activities that substantiate agency investigations with video/written narrative. Since the program began, more than \$2 million dollars in improper UI payments has been prevented.
- *Fraud Prosecutions:* A partnership formed in June 2013 combines the resources of the Connecticut Department of Labor and Office of the Chief State’s Attorney. The team fights unemployment insurance fraud by prosecuting offenders for collecting UI benefits to which they are not entitled. Since the program began, 108 arrests were initiated, accounting for more than \$2.5 million in overpaid UI benefits and \$900,000 being recovered.
- *Treasury Offset Program (TOP):* Working in collaboration with the Internal Revenue Service and USDOL since March 2012, more than \$9.8 million has been recovered from individuals with a fraud overpayment that have not responded to agency requests for repayment. These individuals were identified and their information provided to the IRS for recovery via federal income tax refund interceptions or garnishment of federal wages.
- *Garnishment/Wage Execution Program:* Since January 2013 when updated E-filing technology was implemented, the agency has recovered more than \$4.5 million in outstanding UI overpayment debt.
- *Information Messages:* To deter fraudulent activities, the agency continues to provide claimant and employer educational messages to deter and prevent unemployment insurance fraud. Posters, claimant mailings, employer newsletters, claimant videos and tip sheets, conferences, and media releases are part of the campaign. This year the agency purchased a series of billboards along Connecticut highways and high-traffic areas to inform the public that unemployment insurance fraud is a crime. The billboards, operational from October-December 2014, are now a web banner educational tool on the CTDOL website.

Special Initiatives

- *Shared Work*: Law changes implemented in October 2013 and July 2014 expand the program and offer more employers the opportunity to take part in the program and avoid laying off skilled workers. Due to increased outreach efforts, an average of 130 companies and 900 employees are currently participating in the program.
- *Subsidized Training and Employment Program (Step Up)* promotes job creation and worker opportunity for Connecticut small businesses and unemployed workers and offers employer incentives for hiring new workers. Since its inception, this state program, which is part of the 2011 Jobs Creation Bill, has resulted in the hiring of 3,353 new employees with 988 unduplicated companies participating in the program. Positions include machinists, machine and press operators, CNC specialists, mechanics, paralegals, engineers, office support, electricians, data center technicians, cable technicians, property managers, lab technicians, welders, carpenters, and sales representatives. The *Step Up for Vets* program, added in 2012, has resulted in an additional 436 employees hired at 257 companies.
- *Misclassification*: Through its Wage and Workplace Standards Division, the agency has increased public awareness and strengthened its efforts to identify and deter willful employee misclassification by expanding its investigation efforts, resulting in the issuing of Stop Work orders to a number of employers. Misclassification occurs when employers intentionally misclassify workers as independent contractors rather than employees of the company. In an attempt to circumvent the law and cut costs by failing to provide required employee protections (such as worker's compensation) employers create an unfair advantage over companies abiding by state laws. During the year, 121 construction projects were visited and 324 contractor records were reviewed. This activity resulted in the issuance of 164 Stop Work orders, which requires cited employers to show proof of appropriate coverage before worksites can be re-opened and work resumed. CTDOL's Unemployment Insurance Tax Division also works to deter misclassification, and staff accomplished this by conducting more than 1,900 employer audits and approximately 8,600 individual wage investigations. These examinations resulted in the reclassification of more than 8,000 workers and the discovery of more than \$73 million in previously unreported payroll.
- *Improved Workshop Curriculum*: CTDOL updated three core workshops (Résumé Basics, Job Search Strategies, and Interviewing Strategies and Techniques) to incorporate the latest trends in these subject areas. Improvements included new facilitator training, updated participant manuals, and feedback from employer focus groups to ensure that CTDOL is preparing jobseekers for an effective job search.
- *Social Media Use in the Job Search*: CTDOL partnered with Middlesex Community College and workforce partners to create a video series to educate jobseekers on using LinkedIn as a networking tool for finding a new job or a better job.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

Wage and Workplace Standards Violations

- Labor Department investigators recovered a total of \$6,136,111.56 in legally due wages for employees during the past fiscal year. This included \$1,547,127.12 recovered by wage enforcement staff responding to 2,337 complaints that owed wages had not been paid. Wage and Workplace Standards staff also returned \$788,472.70 to 1,003 workers who were not paid for overtime work or who were paid less than minimum wage and recovered \$1,607,602.50 by enforcing the state's prevailing wage laws. An additional \$243,289.28 was recouped in back pay owed to 35 service workers hired by private contractors.
- Violations of prevailing wage laws were determined after investigators conducted 45 payroll audits and made 21 site inspections. A total of 514 employees received owed wages as a result of non-payment of prevailing wage rates.
- Violations were found in 253 additional cases concerning employment of minors in the workplace (hours of labor, night work of minors, prohibited employment of minors, working papers/certificates of age), smoking in the workplace, meal/rest periods, personnel files, and drug testing issues.
- A total of 164 Stop Work orders were issued to employers that did not comply with Workers' Compensation requirements. Following on-site investigations, these companies were required to cease work on a construction project until certain workplace regulations were met. In some cases, it was determined that employers misrepresented employees as independent contractors, a practice that causes an economic disadvantage to companies following the law and to those workers that are misclassified.

Unemployment Compensation

- Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits paid to unemployed workers totaled \$716 million. Of that amount, \$660.5 million was paid to claimants formerly employed by employers paying quarterly UI taxes under the regular UI benefits program, and \$55.5 million was provided to claimants formerly employed by non-taxable employers and/or under other programs. Total taxes paid by more than 100,000 employers whose employees were covered by Unemployment Insurance totaled \$814 million.

Population and Employment Data

- Through its Office of Research, the agency completes special state, local, or sub-state regional studies and economic analyses to provide information support for economic transition, workforce development initiatives, education program analysis and development, and responses to major layoffs or disasters. Strategies for addressing issues such as labor gaps, and for positioning the state's educational and workforce systems to be able to respond quickly to critical areas of workforce need, are a fundamental part of the

Governor's vision for Connecticut's workforce and economic development efforts.

Occupational Analysis Products and Publications

- *2014 Information for Workforce Investment Planning (annual)* contains a variety of data on Connecticut and each of the state's five Workforce Investment Areas including population and population density, labor force, employment and wages by industry sector, and new housing permits. In addition, detailed information on residents in need of workforce investment services such as high school dropouts, Medicaid recipients, adult probationers, Temporary Family Assistance recipients, and other residents with barriers to employment is included. Also incorporated is information on commuting patterns, long-term unemployment insurance claimants, a work area profile for each Workforce Investment Area as well as appendix tables and historical data on the aforementioned topics for comparisons and trends analysis. This Year we moved the IWIP regional program entirely electronic with an enhanced regional Labor Market Information module on our website
- *Connecticut Career Paths* is a planning guide developed for mainly high school students and those making or guiding career choices. Nearly 500 occupations are profiled, along with their employment levels, growth potential, expected earnings, skills requirements, and education paths. Connecticut Career Paths is published every two years and the new edition will be available in the Fall of 2015.
- *Connecticut's Reemployment Portal* displays occupations with similar characteristics such as knowledge areas, tools and technology, and general work activities of selected occupations to connect jobseekers with helpful information and current job openings.
- *Training and Education Planning System (TEPS)* is a tool designed to aid the analysis and discussion of the demand and supply of talent in Connecticut's workforce. It is intended to help identify where there may be skill shortages or surpluses in the labor market, and thereby guide investments in education and training programs by program planners and administrators, as well as by individuals considering career options. The program is intended primarily for educational administrators and workforce development training providers that are considering whether or not to develop a new program, expand or contract an existing one, or drop an existing program, by showing where there may be a need for trained workers.
- *Economic Indicator Scorecards* are monthly updated economic indicators that present an overall picture of the current conditions in the Connecticut labor market, business climate, consumer sector and the current/future overall. These include charts, trends, year-to-year changes and data for 24 economic indicators.

CONN-OSHA

- *Report on inspections:* The Occupational Safety and Health Division conducted safety and/or health compliance inspections at 169 public worksites, affecting workplace conditions of 24,198 state and municipal employees. Violations were documented in 101 of

those inspections, with citations for 144 “serious” violations, 131 “other than serious” violations, one “willful” violation, and one “repeat” violation.

- *Report on consultations, training and clinics:* CONN-OSHA provided safety and health consultations to 437 private-sector businesses that collectively employ 19,018 workers and 119 public sector workplaces with a total of 9,739 employees. Additionally, safety training programs and outreach were provided to 7,642 employees.

Mediation and Arbitration

- During the year, 547 grievances were filed for arbitration and 1,013 formal grievance arbitration hearings were scheduled, resulting in 694 cases being successfully closed and 70 awards issued. Expiration notices on 184 private sector contracts were received. In compliance with State Statutes, the Board of Mediation and Arbitration imposed binding arbitration on 312 municipal contracts and one state contract. Mediators responded to a total of 699 requests for grievance/contract mediation.