

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
May 5, 2023

PRESENT: Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz
General Counsel, OSC, Yam Menon
Deputy Treasurer Sarah Sanders
Senator Catherine Osten
Senator Eric Berthel
Representative Toni Walker
Representative Tammy Nuccio
Representative Lucy Dathan (Alternate)
Deputy Secretary Paul Potamianos
Office of Policy and Management, Finance Advisory Committee Clerk

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m.

The minutes of the April 6, 2023, meeting were adopted.

The following new transactions were considered by the committee:

2023-13 for the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity. Transfer of \$15,000 from the Other Expenses account to Personal Services account to cover promotions, pay increases, and other compensation costs.

The item was unanimously approved without discussion.

2023-14 for the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Transfer of \$250,000 from the Personal Services account to the Other Expenses account to cover operational costs through the remainder of the fiscal year.

Senator Osten asked about the number of vacant positions. Briana Mitchell, Fiscal Administrative Manager, responded that 15 positions were currently vacant but that all were in the process of being filled. Senator Osten asked the agency to provide specific information as to the status of filling the positions.

The item was unanimously approved.

2023-15 for the Division of Criminal Justice. Transfer of \$130,000 from the Personal Services account to the Witness Protection account to support programmatic costs through the remainder of the fiscal year.

Senator Osten referenced the meeting materials, which mention a "delay in filling approximately 50 vacancies" and asked where the positions are in the hiring process. Deputy Chief State's Attorney John Russotto responded that 12 positions out of 57 vacancies are filled and getting background checks, 8 are going before the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC), while 13 non-prosecutor positions are pending interviews, and 6 are being posted by DAS. Mr. Russotto also noted that the first 12 positions are a mix of classifications, including clerical and investigative staff. He also confirmed the 8 going before the CJC have not been given a conditional offer and will be interviewed on May 15, the day of the next CJC meeting. The balance remaining of 18 are at the beginning of the recruitment process.

Representative Nuccio asked about arrests and types of cases and how they relate to the \$130,000 shortfall in Witness Protection. Mr. Russotto responded that many factors drive the costs in witness protection: the number of cases, inflationary costs of protecting witnesses, and that cases are picking back up post-pandemic.

Representative Dathan asked about the types of positions being filled and asked whether they could be broken down by prosecutors versus other types as well as whether they deal with juveniles. Mr. Russotto responded that the DCJ is in very good shape in juvenile court personnel and that he can't think of any vacancies right now in any of those courts. He shared that out of the 57 vacancies, 29 are prosecutors, 2 managerial/exempt, 4 in administrative (IT and Finance), 4 inspectors, and 18 overall support staff (paralegals, clericals). Representative Dathan asked if, in hiring, the agency has found that salaries are appropriate and comparable or if we are losing people. Mr. Russotto responded that it's an uphill climb for anyone in government, with the experience being steeper with lawyers. He added that a few things are happening to address that issue: first, beginning July 1, there will be a reworking of the prosecutor salary schedule, because the agency is seeing fewer candidates for prosecutor. He shared that, pre-pandemic, the agency would see 50-100 applicants; today it's about 15-30. There are several factors, but salary is a major one. Second, the agency is in informal conversations with the prosecutor union to discuss short-term and long-term issues, including issues of compensation.

The item was unanimously approved.

2023-16 for the Department of Banking. Transfer of \$44,900 from the Equipment account to the Other Expenses account to align funding for operational costs in the appropriate accounts.

The item was unanimously approved without discussion.

2023-17 for the Department of Public Health. Transfer of \$1,713,483 from the Personal Services account to the Other Expenses and the Local & District Departments of Health accounts to support the health district grants, vaccines, and other programmatic requirements through the remainder of the fiscal year.

After lengthy discussion to determine how many of DPH's vacancies were funded and of those how many were in the process of active hiring, Michelle Schott, Chief Operating Officer, offered to provide additional information.

Senator Osten asked about hiring efforts. Adelita Orefice, Chief of Staff, explained that the past few years had required their focus to be on hiring federally funded COVID positions to support COVID-related activities, sometimes at the expense of activities funded under the General Fund, because of staffing limitations and the need to address the pandemic. It was also noted that their hiring process has become more streamlined, and hiring is now taking between 3 and 6 months. Representative Walker asked whether any of the vacancies were cannabis related. Ms. Schott said they would include that information with the other follow-up materials they will be providing. Representative Dathan asked whether any of the vacancies were impacting programming. Ms. Schott responded that their contracting staff had been severely depleted through transfers and retirements but that they have been working to refill and develop more efficient policies and procedures and expected that by the end of July. Representative Dathan asked about the differences in what DPH contracts for and what DAS contracts for; Ms. Schott responded that they contract for individual human services and DAS contracts for commodities.

Representative Nuccio asked whether the utilities shortfall is related to increased utilization or delivery rate increases. When Ms. Schott responded that it was due to increased costs, she asked whether the agency could work with DAS to determine if they could find another provider who would be less expensive. She also inquired about the expenses related to the closure of Stone Academy and whether they were necessary for individuals that had already passed the state boards. Ms. Orefice explained that they were providing training and refresher activities for two cohorts of individuals, and they believed this was necessary so the students themselves and employers could feel confident about the skills of those licensees. Representative Nuccio also asked about the \$150,000 related to auditing and Ms. Schott explained that this was for auditing Coronavirus Relief Fund testing activities in long term care facilities.

Senator Osten asked for a roll call vote. Senator Berthel and Representative Nuccio voted against; all other members voted in favor of the item.

The item was approved by majority vote.

2023-18 for the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System. Transfer of \$2,500,000 from the Personal Services account to the Other Expenses account to address utility and other operating costs.

Representative Walker asked how many positions are currently vacant. Kisha Richardson, Fiscal Administrative Manager, responded that the agency has 215 full-time vacancies, and provided information about the hiring status. Representative Walker asked whether the bulk of the vacant positions are teachers, and if so in what areas. Dr. Ellen Solek responded that she did not have that information on hand but will provide that to the committee. Ms. Richardson noted that most of the vacancies are for instructional positions. Representative Walker asked for the dollar value of the 215 vacancies. Ms. Robertson answered approximately \$3.5 million which includes both full-time and part-time positions. Representative Walker asked if this transfer will be addressing anything other than utilities. Ms. Richardson responded that this transfer would also address subscription license renewals for the next school year including areas like recruitment, hiring, absenteeism, licenses for the trade department and other areas. Representative Walker asked if CTEC uses the Department of Administrative Services for recruitment. Ms. Richardson responded that CTEC does their own recruitment for instructional positions, and that DAS is used to recruit classified (non-instructional) positions. Representative Walker asked if CTEC has human resources staff for recruitment and Ms. Richardson responded affirmatively, and that DAS assists with recruiting.

Senator Berthel asked about utilities costs for CTEC. Ms. Richardson responded approximately \$1.9 million. Senator Berthel inquired whether this is due to the increase in rates and whether we are buying power through Eversource, which Ms. Richardson confirmed. Senator Berthel asked if the funds for subscriptions were included in the budget, and Ms. Richardson confirmed this and added that increased utilities costs displaced the funds budgeted for subscriptions.

Representative Dathan asked whether position vacancies are instructional or administrative. Ms. Richardson replied that 180 are instructional positions and 35 are classified positions. Representative Dathan asked if the instructional positions are for new or existing trades. Ms. Richardson responded that 10 are for new trades, the rest are for existing trades. Recruiting is done on an ongoing basis, but new teachers are not brought on this late in the academic year.

Senator Osten asked to go over the position vacancies again to clarify where positions are in the hiring process. She asked if the vacancies incorporate HVAC, and World Language instructors and where they

are in the hiring process. Dr. Ellen Solek, Executive Director responded that the World Language and HVAC positions are still in process. She explained that there are enough teachers to fill the World Language requirement, however they are still looking for three additional Spanish instructors for the fall. Senator Osten asked if there are enough teachers to meet the demand for HVAC. Dr. Solek indicated that they would have enough to meet the state standard requirement and added that they are always recruiting for trade positions. It was then asked if CTEC is competitive in pay to which Dr. Solek responded yes, they are competitive compared to other academic areas.

Representative Nuccio noted constituent concerns regarding Windham Tech being without HVAC teachers. She asked what modifications are being made to bring in professionals to teach this trade. Dr. Solek answered that every trade area has a consultant assigned to that program. In the case of HVAC, there is a licensed and certified consultant who provides lesson planning and supervises the substitute that is providing the instruction. Programming is geared to what the HVAC students are required to know by the time they graduate. Representative Nuccio asked if certification is required for teachers. Dr. Solek responded that certification is required to teach in the classrooms; trade instructors are licensed by the State Department of Education.

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz suggested that additional conversation continue outside of this meeting due to the importance of this type of instruction.

The Item was unanimously approved.

2023-19 for the Office of Early Childhood. Transfer of \$800,000 from the Early Care & Education account to the Birth to Three account, in order to cover services for this entitlement program through the end of the fiscal year.

Senator Osten inquired about funding for Birth to Three program providers. Commissioner Beth Bye stated that the legislature approved additional General Administrative Payments (GAP) which providers are receiving, however they are challenged with workforce issues and the cost of specialists. Sarah Poulin, Fiscal Administrative Manager, explained that Birth to Three providers were initially ineligible for the COLA due to regulation language; however, new language now makes them eligible. Considerable discussion ensued about the intent of the additional funding for providers. Commissioner Bye stated that they will provide additional information to the committee.

Representative Walker stated that the Governor's budget includes an additional \$15 million in this line item for early care and education. Rep. Walker asked if there are additional funds that are not being utilized right now. Commissioner Bye responded that they have extra funds in that line item, which is why they are requesting a transfer. Traditionally, they do lapse in that line item due to enrollment not being at 100% which they plan for. Commissioner Bye stated that utilization has decreased since COVID-19. Representative Walker spoke about the need for more apprenticeship programs and stated that funding was put into the budget for apprenticeships to help grow staffing. Commissioner Bye responded that they have been able to obtain apprenticeships using ARPA funds. Rep. Walker closed by stating that if the language put out on the nonprofit funding does not address the population that you were employing, please let them know early on, so that they can inform people that they have not been forgotten and that the state is behind this industry in every way.

Representative Nuccio asked how the population in rural areas are being served. Commissioner Bye responded that OEC has programs throughout the state. They have also been investing in early childhood

lab schools to reach all the community colleges to do more workforce development and training. OEC has re-structured RFPs, and services to not just focus on low income, but also income needs combined with the childcare desert score. This is something new that the agency is trying out specifically for infant-toddler slots. Representative Nuccio asked whether the agency is finding this successful. Commissioner Bye answered that while it has been successful to a certain extent, there have been some bumps: the openings are in pre-school, and the shortage is in the infant and toddler area across the state.

The item was unanimously approved.

2023-20 for the Department of Children and Families. Transfer of \$2,550,000 from the Personal Services account to the Other Expenses account to cover fuel and utility and other operating costs.

Senator Osten thanked the agency for accurately representing how many vacant full time and part time positions they have and asked where those vacancies are in the process of being refilled. After establishing that the utilities shortfall is related to increases in cost, Representative Walker suggested that because there are four agencies on the May 5 agenda that are requesting to cover increased utility costs, she hoped that the state would explore alternative purchasing options. She also asked about the large FY 2023 surplus in the Board and Care accounts and expressed concern about whether the accounts are appropriately funded in the FY 2024 budget reported out by the Appropriations Committee. Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes stated they are still analyzing their FY 2024 needs and will continue to share updates with the committee.

Representative Dathan asked about the caseload trend analyses provided the human services subcommittee and whether the information is still accurate. Melanie Sparks, Chief Fiscal Officer explained the information is continuously updated. Representative Dathan asked whether delays in hiring have caused issues with caseloads. Deputy Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly explained that most of the vacancies are associated with the Solnit North and South programs, and that depending on the position being recruited, refill can take over a year which required the agency to change the staffing model. She reported that staffing shortages have also impacted the fiscal office. Ms. Hill-Lilly said that continuous recruitment has been hugely helpful and reported that in the past months, recruitment has been much more successful because staff transferring between agencies and retirements seem to be settling. Deputy Commissioner Hill-Lilly agreed to follow up with Representative Dathan on more of her specific hiring questions. Chief Fiscal Officer Sparks noted that the shortfall related to IT consultants was a result of ensuring staff could work remotely and to keep critical agency activities operating during the pandemic.

The item was unanimously approved.

2023-21 for the Public Defender Services Commission. Transfer of \$152,500 from the Personal Services account to the Training and Education account to fund various agency training initiatives.

Senator Osten asked about the filled position count and the status of filling the current 30 vacancies. Financial Director Steve Hunt responded that 415 are filled, and that the agency has funding for 24 vacancies and 7 of those are being actively recruited, with 6 in the interview process and 1 about to be posted. Mr. Hunt confirmed that twelve vacancies remain unfunded. Senator Osten asked about the status of the remaining 17. Mr. Hunt responded that for the other 17, caseloads are being evaluated to determine where the needs are.

Representative Nuccio asked about the training being mentioned in a recent article, which covers a family day event, and whether or not this transfer addresses that expense. Mr. Hunt responded that funding for the annual meeting is not part of this funding. Representative Nuccio asked whether funding for that annual meeting is somewhere in the agency's budget. Mr. Hunt confirmed it is and that a deposit has been paid but the balance has not. Representative Nuccio asked if the event is expected to go on. Mr. Hunt responded affirmatively.

A roll call vote was taken on the item. Senator Berthel and Representative Nuccio voted against; all other members voted in favor of the item.

The item was approved by majority vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul E. Potamianos", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul E. Potamianos, Deputy Secretary, OPM
Finance Advisory Committee Clerk