

Comments by Sal Luciano
Executive Director, Council 4 AFSCME
Labor & Public Employees Committee – Sept. 28, 2015

Good afternoon, Representative Tercyak, Senator Gomes and members of the Committee. Thank you for holding this important hearing.

I'm Sal Luciano, Executive Director of Council 4 AFSCME. Our union represents 35,000 public service workers, including the dedicated staff at the Connecticut Department of Labor.

As you all know, we are concerned about the future of the Department of Labor in the aftermath of layoffs and job center restructuring.

Front-line DOL employees provide services that are critical to Connecticut's economy.

Our members, the career staff of the DOL, help recently unemployed workers file claims for unemployment insurance. They provide resume writing workshops. They work with employers to develop workforce training programs to expand their businesses. They ensure a level playing field by cracking down on bad employers. And so much more.

These are important services, and frankly we need more people on the job in all of these areas – not fewer.

We appreciate the efforts of the Office of Labor Relations and the agency to find employment in state government for the 95 laid off workers.

We also appreciate that DOL management has recognized the importance of the local job centers and is trying to figure out a way to keep them functioning. That's an improvement over where we stood nearly two months ago.

However, we remain concerned that with 95 less front-line staff working at the DOL, there will be more stress on the state's overall employment system.

The reduction in UI staff will lead to longer wait times for claimants and businesses. Worsening the bottleneck is simply not acceptable. How can this possibly benefit workers and the economy as whole?

The transition to affiliate job centers will impact access to the top-notch employment services currently provided. We are concerned about the absence of DOL employees at these offices. And we wonder if this is another path to the outsourcing of vital public services.

AFSCME has always advocated for a public workforce system that properly connects job seekers with employers, and unemployment claimants with their benefits.

We will remain vigilant as these changes are implemented within the DOL. We thank you for your vigilance, too, as you try to get to the bottom of what happened and how it can be fixed going forward, because the people of Connecticut deserve a fully functioning Department of Labor.

Thank you.