

TESTIMONY PRESENTED
BY:
W. Craig Zimpher, Chair
State Employment Relations Board

BEFORE:
Ohio Senate Finance Committee

May 4, 2011

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, good afternoon. I am Craig Zimpher, Chair of the State Employment Relations Board, or SERB; I'm pleased and honored to be with you today to discuss the proposed biennial budget for SERB and the State Personnel Board of Review, or SPBR. As you know, under the current budget, funding for both agencies was consolidated under SERB. And while the mission and responsibilities of both remain distinct and separate, we have realized significant and productive cost efficiencies and economies of scale through maximizing staff support, facilities allocation, and administration. This has resulted in annual savings of at least \$340,000. Collectively, however, the two Boards oversee practically all aspects of the employer/employee relationship in Ohio's public sector. SERB exercises jurisdiction over all aspects of the collective bargaining process, while the State Personnel Board has jurisdiction over classified employees. Mr. Chairman, the mission of both agencies is to effectuate effective, efficient, fair, and objective administration of the employer/employee personnel and bargaining process. Nearly all phases of the process are, in one aspect or another, overseen by the two agencies.

The maintenance of an efficient and high-quality civil service system is the State Personnel Board's mission. To that end, and in a quasi-judicial capacity, it hears appeals related to removals, suspensions, fines, reclassifications, job abolishments, layoffs, transfers, classified/unclassified status, whistleblowers, and investigation matters. Because the process is not subject to court and related evidentiary procedural, the Board provides an adjudicatory process less formalistic and expensive; more than 50% of the Appellants represent themselves. Another very important function of the SPBR is to assist Ohio's more than 230 municipal civil service commissions to assure consistent compliance with Ohio Civil Service Law.

Mr. Chairman, SERB's principal mission is to facilitate and promote orderly, objective, and constructive labor relations for our public employers, and employees; this mission must be understood at all times to reflect the interests of all parties.

SERB oversees the collective bargaining process for 350,000 unionized employees, employed by more than 1,500 public employers.

SERB's responsibilities include investigating and adjudicating unfair labor practice charges, determining the size and appropriateness of bargaining units, conducting union representation elections, and providing the parties in 1,500 negotiations with comparative wage, benefits, and contract data. The Bureau of Mediation serves the critical preventative function of assisting employers and employees in negotiations to avoid work stoppages and, in every possible manner, to assist these interests in positive, responsible, and respectful labor-management relationships.

In achieving these objectives, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, we are absolutely committed to management of the agencies in the most frugal and prudent manner possible. During the current Biennium, the agency's operating budget has experienced a net 15% decrease. Simultaneously, the agency has effected, over the last two-and-a-half years, an overall reduction of staff by more than 25% and other cost and expense efficiencies through a variety of administrative actions, including:

- Consolidated the staffs of the State Personnel Board and SERB
 - Office space rental savings of approximately \$90,000 per year
- Positions eliminated
 - One Researcher position
 - Chief Fiscal Officer position
 - One Mediator position through attrition
 - One Training officer position through attrition
 - One Account Clerk position through attrition
 - One additional Researcher (12/09) through attrition
 - One Labor Relations Specialist through attrition
 - One Administrative Assistant through attrition

- Eliminated one Administrative Law Judge and discontinued use of contract ALJ's
- Discontinued contracting for IT services with an outside vendor and, instead, contracted for IT services through DAS;
- Eliminated all non-critical service contracts, including professional subscriptions;
- Discontinued the production of hearing transcripts in all cases except those that are required by the Courts;
- Discontinued leasing any vehicles;
- Eliminated unnecessary phone lines;
- Decreased expenses for hosting training conferences by utilizing State venues and providing training materials through paperless media;
- Moved toward other paperless operations including: transmitting internal reports electronically, submitting investigation request electronically, requesting electronic response, and using electronic correspondence wherever else appropriate;
- Terminated memberships in the national Association of Labor Relations Agencies and Ohio State Bar Association;
- Implemented a Voluntary Cost Savings Program (one of first State agencies to do so);
- Implemented electronic contract filings on a voluntary basis, thereby saving significant staff time required to scan those documents;
- Gained statutory authority to conduct mail-ballot representation elections instead of on-site elections;
- No staff travel except Mediators (Board members, and staff, pay their own travel when on official business);
- Revised the administrative rules that govern SERB to make better use of technology and staff time, which provide for filing most documents with SERB via electronic mail;
- Implemented procedures and deadlines for all phases of case processing.

SERB's and the State Personnel Board's priorities are clearly presented on page D-214 of the proposed Executive Budget, and do not need repeating here today.

The proposed FY 2012 and 2013 funding levels of \$3.8 million annually, while affecting a slight decrease from current funding will, nonetheless, enable the agency to continue to:

- Present cases to the SERB Board within 150 days of filing
- Place representation cases on the SERB Board agenda within 180 days of filing
- Support proactive mediation to intervene where/when necessary and appropriate in contract negotiations.
- Allow the State Personnel Board to adjudicate caseloads without erosion of service and to assist in maintaining integrity of civil service systems.
- Allow SERB to fund dispute prevention work to prevent costly, lengthy negotiations and strikes.

Further reductions beyond the proposed 2.8% decrease in SERB's funding could seriously impair both SERB's and the State Personnel Board's ability to timely process cases and to assist public employers and their employees in resolving workplace disputes.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and commit that, within the proposed Executive Budget appropriation, SERB and the State Personnel Board will serve the interests of Ohioans fully and impartially.

Thank you.