

STATE OF MARYLAND

**TASK FORCE REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR  
AND THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

ON

**MODERNIZATION OF THE  
STATE PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

AS REQUIRED BY PAGE 55 OF THE 2023 *JOINT CHAIRMEN'S REPORT*

SECRETARY TISHA EDWARDS,  
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CHAIR

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# **TASK FORCE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF THE STATE PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

## **MEMBERS AND STAFF**

### *State Agency Representatives*

- Tisha Edwards, Secretary, Governor’s Appointments Office, *Chair*
- Serena McIlwain, Secretary, Maryland Department of Environment (MDE), *Member*
  - June Dwyer, Deputy Director – Operational Services, MDE, *Substitute Member*
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- Erin McMullen, Chief of Staff, Maryland Department of Health (MDH), *Member*
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- Aaron Jacobs, Human Resources Director, Maryland Department of Labor, *Member*
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### *Collective Bargaining Unit Representatives*

- Denise Gilmore, Legislative Director, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 3, *Member*
  - Stuart Katzenberg, Director of Collective Bargaining, AFSCME Council 3, *Substitute Member*
  - Hank Hollis, Field Director, AFSCME Council 3, *Substitute Member*
- Jerry Smith, President, Maryland Professional Employees Council, *Member*
- Rosemary Wertz, Field Coordinator, American Federation of Teachers – Healthcare, *Member*

### *Private Sector representative*

- Joel Martinez, HR Director, Amazon
- Kimberly Prescott, President, Prescott HR, Inc.

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## TASK FORCE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF THE STATE PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

### CHARGE

In the 2023 *Joint Chairmen's Report* (JCR), the budget committees of the Maryland General Assembly expressed intent that the Department of Budget and Management convene a task force to evaluate opportunities to modernize and improve recruitment, hiring and retention in the State Personnel Management System. The narrative identified the following topics specifically for the task force to review:

- The approval process for agencies to begin hiring for a position;
- The length of time between stages of the hiring process;
- The requirements for selection to an interview;
- Degree requirements; and
- Any other impediments to the State hiring process.

The JCR narrative also suggested the task force consider the following improvements:

- Proactive recruitment strategies, including in high schools and in cooperation with workforce agency career counselors;
- Rewriting position titles and job descriptions to be more attractive to potential applicants;
- Continuous posting of appropriate positions;
- Streamlining the hiring process to reduce the time from application to hiring;
- Expanding career ladders, beginning with a low experience level and integrating on-the-job and classroom training;
- Sponsorship of registered apprenticeships;
- Focusing applicant requirements on relevant skills rather than degrees; and
- Other improvements identified by task force members.

In response to the topics specified by the JCR narrative, task force meetings focused on the following goals:

- (1) improving the hiring process and applicant experience;
- (2) pursuing proactive recruitment strategies;
- (3) improving job attractiveness;
- (4) expanding career ladders; and
- (5) reviewing job requirements.

The task force's first meeting was Tuesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023. The task force met every other week through November 14, 2023.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the Moore-Miller Administration took office January 18, 2023, they inherited an Executive Branch that had been gutted and chronically understaffed for nearly a decade. Since day one, the Administration has committed to rebuilding State government to ensure Marylanders receive the essential services and support they need and deserve. In response to this vacancy crisis, the Maryland General Assembly asked the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to convene a task force dedicated to examining the opportunities to modernize the State Personnel Management System (SPMS) and offer solutions to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of State employees. The task force looked at bottlenecks in the hiring process, proactive recruitment strategies, methods to improve job attractiveness, career ladders and pathways, and job requirements.

As of August 1, 2023, the average time to fill a State position was 127 calendar days (4 months) from the time the position became vacant to the hire date of a new employee. The task force felt the lack of flexibility in the hiring process prevents State agencies from making certain adjustments and improvements due to requirements in statute, but several task force members did not feel these requirements were the primary factor in long hiring times. The task force believed the time to hire could improve by establishing hiring processing timelines and best practices. As a result, the task force recommended the following: (1) applicant raters should begin rating applicants prior to the close of job announcements; (2) the State should establish “service level agreements” that set clear expectations for process standards and timelines; and (3) the State should provide staff dedicated to the hiring process from start to finish to instill ownership over the process and improve the quality and throughput of applicants.

In addition to the overall hiring process requirements, the task force recognized the importance of a positive applicant experience when recruiting new talent. Applicants who feel valued during the recruitment process are more likely to accept a job offer and refer others to the State. The task force felt the State could do the following to improve the applicant experience: (1) increase communication with applicants during the application review and interview process; (2) create a “hire now” recruitment environment by expanding the State’s applicant referral efforts; and (3) connect applicants to State positions through better career matching efforts and improved job search functions.

The task force was also asked to consider proactive recruitment strategies as a solution to filling State vacancies. While the task force agreed that the State should explore dedicated funding for recruitment activities in SPMS, the task force felt that connecting current applicants with State jobs was a higher priority, given the high number of applicants the State currently receives.

The task force was asked to discuss career ladders and alternative pathways. The task force agreed that the State should continue to explore options to (1) develop talent pipelines for positions with shrinking talent pools; (2) expand career ladders by adding progression to existing job classifications to increase retention; (3) make use of non-competitive promotions and other promotional opportunities to improve retention and succession planning; and (4) explore the establishment of alternative career pathways and apprenticeships.

The task force felt that the following activities the State was already doing to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention should continue and possibly expand: (1) encourage agencies to use more descriptive working titles in job announcements; (2) continue to use open/continuous job openings for jobs with chronic vacancies; and (3) continue to review job requirements for opportunities to increase access to employment.

The task force acknowledged that implementing many of these changes will only be successful with additional resources and support for current agency staff, and that the provision of additional resources and funding will need to be weighed against many other priorities in the State's budget. The task force recommends that DBM create a plan to implement the recommendations of the task force to modernize SPMS.

## I. State Personnel Management System Overview

Most employees of the Executive Branch of Maryland State Government belong to the State Personnel Management System (SPMS). As of July 1, 2023, 64 State agencies (approximately 39,000 positions) were under the umbrella of SPMS, which is overseen by the Secretary of Budget and Management. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), institutions of higher education, and other independent executive agencies are excluded from SPMS, as well as the legislative and judicial branches of government. SPMS agencies are subject to the laws established in the State Personnel and Pensions (SPP) Article of the Maryland statute, which covers laws regarding State employment, compensation, discipline, grievances, collective bargaining, leave, benefits, *etc.*

### Employment in SPMS

All SPMS State regular employees belong to one of the following four employment categories:

- **Executive Service**, which include chief administrators of principal units of government under SPMS, deputy secretaries, assistant secretaries or positions of equivalent status as determined by the Secretary of Budget and Management;
- **Management Service**, which include positions with direct responsibility and oversight of personnel and financial resources requiring discretion and independent judgment;
- **Professional Service**, which generally require knowledge of an advanced type of field of science or acquired by specialized instruction and normally requires a professional license, advanced degree, or both; and
- **Skilled Service**, which generally are all other positions not designated as being in another service category.

Most employees in skilled and professional service positions are subject to merit hiring procedures that are outlined in SPP 7-201 through 7-209 (provided in **Appendix 1**). These procedures include processes for public advertisement, testing, placement on a certified eligible list, and rules around candidate selection. The goal of a merit hiring process is to reduce bias and ensure hiring is based on merit. Additionally, merit employees are subject to progressive discipline and may only be terminated for just cause.

In comparison, positions in the executive and management service categories are considered “at-will” employees. At-will employees can be hired and terminated at the discretion of the appointing authority or agency head. The hiring of at-will employees does not need to follow merit system procedures, but candidates must meet the qualifications for the position. Employees in skilled and professional service may also be at-will if they are considered “special

appointments”<sup>1</sup>. Special appointment hiring and disciplinary processes follow the same process as executive and management service positions.

Given that statute primarily dictates requirements for merit employees, and over 85% of State regular SPMS employees are merit employees, the task force decided to focus on hiring concerns as it relates to merit employees.

## II. Improve the Hiring Process and Applicant Experience

The task force was asked to review the following topics related to the hiring process:

- the approval process for agencies to begin hiring for a position;
- the length of time between stages of the hiring process; and
- the requirements for selection to an interview.

As a result of this review, the task force identified the following issues with the State’s hiring process:

- the process is labor intensive, lengthy, and difficult for applicants, human resources (HR) staff and hiring managers;
- aside from the time it takes from opening a recruitment to list creation, there are few guidelines or best practices associated with hiring timelines; and
- there is no dedicated ownership over individual recruitments from start to finish.

### Hiring Process Overview

The task force received presentations from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), which laid out the steps and parties involved with the SPMS hiring process. According to DBM, as of August 1, 2023, the average time to fill an SPMS State regular position was 127 calendar days (approximately 4 months) from the time the position became vacant to the hire date of a new employee. The first 6 weeks of the hiring process includes a 1-week notification to DBM of the selection plan, a 2-week required posting period, and 3 weeks to create a list of eligible candidates based on statutory required scoring<sup>2</sup>. **Exhibit 1** provides an overview of the hiring process from the perspective of the agency, side-by-side with the candidate’s experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Special appointments include direct appointees of the Governor or the Board of Public Works; positions assigned to Government House or Governor’s Office; positions that perform a significant policy role or provides direct support to an employee of the Executive Service; or any other position designated by law to be a special appointment.

<sup>2</sup> “State Personnel Management System Hiring Process” Presentation to the Task Force on August 22, 2023, by Mark Townend, Executive Director of the Recruitment and Examination Division of the Department of Budget and Management.



SPP Article Section 7-201 through 7-209 defines requirements for the hiring process for employees in SPMS (provided in Appendix 1). Key provisions of the SPP recruitment law include the following:

- specific requirements for position selection plans;
- posting details and timeframe requirements;
- candidate scoring;
- provision of additional points to certain priority groups; and
- candidate selection rules.

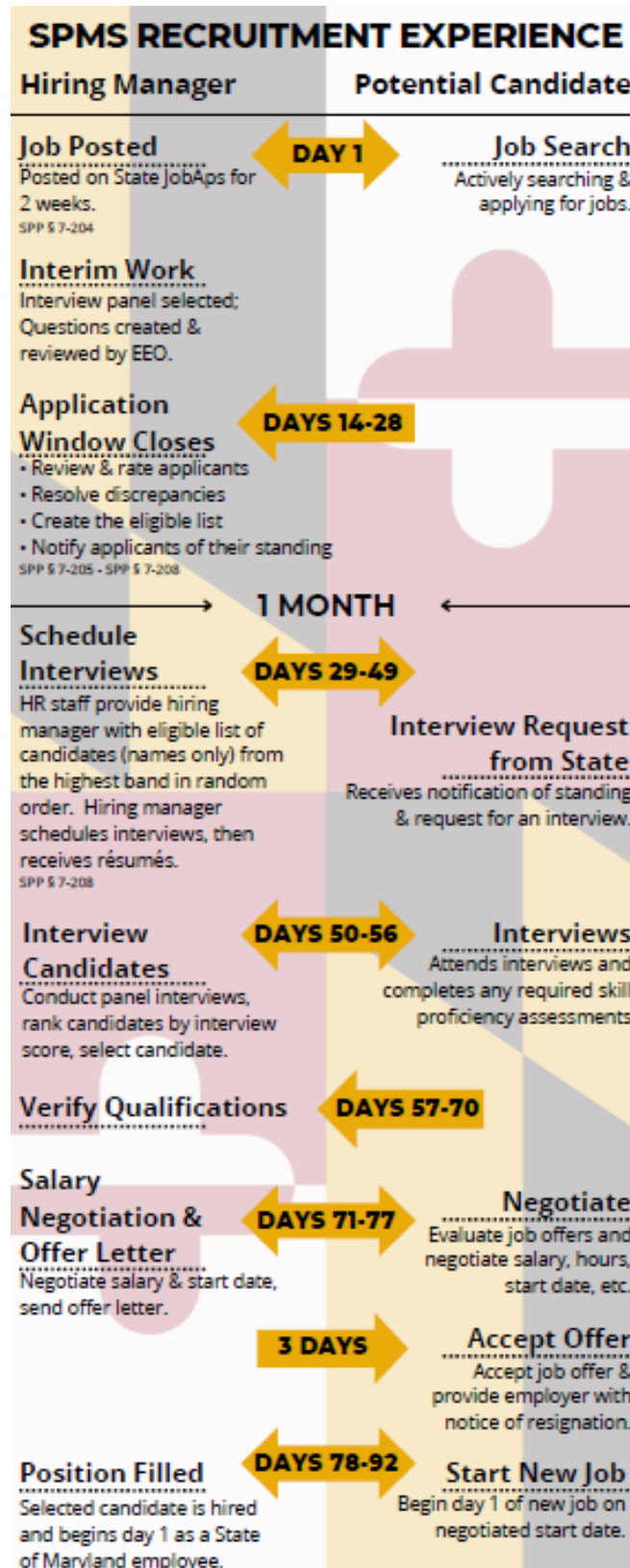
The statutory requirements identified by the task force as potentially increasing the time to hire included:

- **1-week notice to DBM:** Appointing authorities<sup>3</sup> are required by law to allow DBM up to 1 week to review position selection plans prior to job announcement postings; although in practice DBM often approves selection plans within 24-48 hours.
- **2-week posting requirement:** Job postings must be advertised for a minimum of 2 weeks prior to closure, although in practice agencies may extend job postings to allow more applications.
- **Specified rating and banding process:** After a job announcement closes, all applicants must be rated and placed into bands of best qualified, better qualified, and qualified prior to the list of applicants being sent to the hiring manager. Applicants who are not qualified receive notification that they were eliminated from consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> Appointing authority is defined as an individual or unit of government that has authority to make appointments or terminate employment, per State Personnel and Pensions Article 1-101.

## Exhibit 1 SPMS Recruitment Workflow



The task force agreed that the statutory requirements for the SPMS hiring process are very prescriptive and do not allow flexibility. The only time an appointing authority may opt for a “streamlined hiring process” (bypassing certain statutory requirements) for merit positions is when the appointing authority demonstrates recruitment difficulty or a need to hire in a timely manner. In response to significant vacancies statewide, DBM has authorized streamlined hiring since March 2022 for positions with vacancies that exceed the SPMS overall vacancy rate. As a result of this increased flexibility, agencies such as the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) have been able to extend conditional job offers at one-day hiring events and make great progress on correctional officer and administrative vacancies.

Several task force members felt the lack of flexibility in the hiring process prevented agencies from making certain adjustments and improvements due to requirements in statute. Other task force members felt, while contributory, statutory requirements were not the primary factor in long hiring times. These members felt the time to hire was dependent on the timeliness of those involved in the process, including the hiring manager, the HR staff, and the recruitment staff; however, several members pointed out that factors outside of the agency’s control can contribute to longer hiring times, such as a lack of qualified candidates, a candidate rejecting the State’s job offer, a delayed start date requested, *etc.*

In an ideal scenario, the hiring process should be initiated as soon as a hiring manager or HR staff is made aware of an employee’s impending departure. The first steps to initiate a job posting are as follows:

- receive approval from the appointing authority to fill the position;
- review and revise the position description, as necessary;
- determine minimum and selective qualifications for the position;
- determine any limitations on the selection process (*e.g.*, current State employees, location, contractual employees only; *etc.*); and
- establish the method and length of the time the job will be posted.

Assuming these steps are taken immediately, a job posting could go live even before a position has been vacated. Once a job posting closes, the applications must be reviewed to determine who meets the minimum qualifications, and then rated to determine who is best qualified, better qualified, and qualified. The length of time the application review process takes depends upon the number of applications received. The length of time the scoring process takes is largely dependent on the number of candidates who meet the minimum qualifications for the position, the complexity of the rating process, and how many discrepancies raters must investigate. Under an ideal scenario, the hiring process could be completed within 56-70 days (8-10 weeks) or half the time the State currently takes to hire, as demonstrated in **Exhibit 2**. Compared to the private sector, even the State’s ideal hiring scenario takes a long time, and results in the loss of qualified candidates in a competitive market.

## Exhibit 2 Ideal SPMS Hiring Timeline

| <b><u>Hiring Process Action</u></b>  | <b><u>Ideal Timeframe</u></b> |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>Employee gives 2 weeks' notice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hiring manager reviews the position description and completes pre-posting tasks.</li> <li>● Agency recruitment staff develop the selection plan and job posting.</li> <li>● DBM reviews the proposed position selection plan (1 week review required by law, but usually completed within 24-48 hours).</li> </ul> | 14 days (2 weeks)             |
| <p>Job announcement is posted for a minimum of 2 weeks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hiring managers pull together a diverse interview panel and find times to schedule interviews.</li> <li>● Hiring managers create interview questions with scoring guides.</li> <li>● EEO reviews the panel and interview materials.</li> </ul>  | 14 days (2 weeks)             |
| <p>Agency recruitment staff review applications to determine who meets the minimum qualifications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Candidates are scored and placed into bands. The eligible list is generated.</li> </ul>  | 7 days (1 week)               |
| <p>Hiring managers schedule and conduct interviews.</p>  | 14 days (2 weeks)             |

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| Hiring managers decide on a candidate and receive approval on the job offer by the appointing authority.   | 7 days (1 week)           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidate selection justification is reviewed by EEO.</li> <li>• Salary exceptions are evaluated by DBM.</li> </ul> |                           |
| Candidates review the job offer.   | 7 days (1 week)           |
| Candidates start 2 weeks after acceptance of the job offer.  | 14 days (2 weeks)         |
| <b>Total Time to Hire from Posted Vacancy</b>  | <b>63 days (9 weeks)*</b> |

\*For sensitive positions, background investigations and other pre-employment screenings (such as drug tests, psychological exams, and physicals) may increase the hiring timeline by 30-45 days.

DBM: Department of Budget and Management

EEO: Equal Employment Office

SPMS: State Personnel Management System

Source: Department of Budget and Management

Not all recruitments will go as smoothly as the ideal scenario provided. Sometimes a job posting does not generate enough qualified candidates and an extension is required, or an announcement has to be reposted. Sometimes a candidate is offered a job but declines because they have accepted another offer, or their own employer has countered with a higher salary to retain them. Some task force members identified the State’s inflexibility when it comes to salary negotiations as an impediment to hiring. To facilitate more equitable treatment of State employees across job classifications, the State follows a standard salary plan and has rules that prevent offering new hires higher salaries on the pay scale, with some exceptions. These restrictions can make it difficult for the State to offer salaries to recruit candidates with exceptional skills or keep pace with shifting marketplace demands proactively.

Acknowledging these external factors that impact the hiring timeline, the task force generally agreed that improvements could be made to shorten the State’s time to hire. The task force received a presentation on September 19, 2023, on hiring processes in the private sector, which are more expedient than the State’s<sup>4</sup>. Several best practices in private sector hiring include (1) service level agreements (SLAs) between each stage of the hiring process; and (2) dedicated recruitment staff that take ownership over the entire process.

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<sup>4</sup> Presentation to the Task Force on September 19, 2023, by Joel Martinez, Human Resources Director, Amazon.

## **Service Level Agreements**

SLAs are contracts between a service provider (or employer) and customers (or applicants) that document what services the provider will furnish and define the service standards the provider is obligated to meet. A private sector best practice is to have designated timeframe expectations for each part of the hiring process. If certain stages of the hiring process are not complete within these timeframes, the parties responsible for each stage are contacted and the lagging performance reviewed. Currently, the State has no SLAs associated with the hiring process timeline after a list is provided to the hiring manager per statute.

## **Ownership of the Hiring Process**

Another issue with the State's hiring process identified by the task force is the lack of ownership from start to finish. The process is divided amongst multiple parties that are responsible for distinct parts of the hiring process, as follows:

- hiring managers request permission to fill a position;
- appointing authorities approve the request to fill the position;
- hiring managers review the position description, determine position specific qualifications and job posting requirements;
- agency recruitment staff collaborate with managers to develop selection plans and job postings, and provide additional media recommendations as requested;
- agency HR reviews and DBM approves selection plans and posting;
- DBM ensures position selection plans are in compliance with the law, regulations, policies and practices; review postings for consistency and branding on the State's job site; and provide additional media recommendations as requested;
- agency recruitment staff assist managers in creating rating/testing materials, then rate candidates based on required and preferred qualifications, and add any identified preference points;
- hiring managers schedule interviews, gather a diverse interview panel, and create or select interview questions provided by recruitment staff with clear scoring guidelines;
- hiring managers make the candidate selection with appropriate justification and negotiate salary;
- DBM reviews the justification for salary rule exceptions against other agency hiring and consider agency and statewide equity issues to sign off on salary exceptions and candidate selection process; and

- agency HR staff onboard the new hires.

There are rotating responsibilities and multiple levels of approval and review in the State's process, creating potential for bottlenecks at each stage, particularly considering that hiring managers and HR staff often wear many hats and perform many other duties besides recruitment and selection duties. Additionally, in many SPMS agencies, the work is split between two HR sections, recruitment and employment services, further separating the work and removing the candidate and the hiring manager from a single point of contact regarding recruitment and selection. Involvement and steps required in the process also vary by agency, with some agencies having hiring managers take the lead on hires, and others having HR take the lead.

In comparison, a private sector company may have recruitment staff whose primary responsibility is to see the hiring process from start to finish, limiting the risk of bottlenecks, and allowing hiring managers to continue to focus on their primary duties while candidates are being recruited. While hiring managers know the tasks that employees should be doing, a trained recruiter will look for resume red flags, transferable skills, culture fit, and culture add. Many managers are not able to do this analysis and the organization could be missing out on valuable talent as a result. Providing this role division and specialization of recruitment staff offers clarity and shared ownership over the entire process, and ideally produces better recruitment outcomes by capitalizing on the expertise of recruitment staff.

## **Recommendations to Improve the Hiring Process**

- **Recommendation #1: Encourage continuous applicant ratings during the job posting period.** While the rating process usually does not begin until after the job posting has officially closed, there is nothing in statute that would prohibit the applicant rating process from occurring while the job posting is still open. Applicants' scores and categories they are placed in are not dependent on the scores of other applicants; therefore, there is no reason to wait until all applications are received to initiate the rating process. Continuous scoring will make the hiring process faster, allowing a better opportunity to onboard good candidates before other employers hire them. Encouraging raters to begin the rating process will require communication from leadership and a change in agencies' cultures.
- *Considerations: Raters often do not begin the rating process until after the close of the job postings because of their workload. Without additional staff resources, encouraging ratings to occur earlier in the process alone does not mean the rating staff will have the bandwidth to undertake a continuous rating process.*
- **Recommendation #2: Establish service level agreements for the hiring process:** Task force members generally agreed SLAs for the hiring process would be beneficial and allow the State to hold itself accountable to applicants for a timely response. DBM should work with agencies to review processes and establish reasonable SLAs. Once established, the State should inform applicants of SLAs and timeframes to better manage expectations of the process, so applicants feel engaged and valued. The task force also discussed the possibility

of using scorecards to track how well agencies are doing at meeting hiring timeline goals and identify potential bottlenecks in the process.

- *Considerations: As mentioned previously, staff involved in the hiring process have workloads outside of recruitment that are contributing to bottlenecks. Several members expressed concern that the creation of SLAs without providing additional support will set agencies up to fail. The task force felt it was important for the State to explore how SLAs will be used prior to formal establishment, and to consider how the use of SLAs will be communicated with agency staff. For instance, SLAs used in a punitive manner, particularly without the provision of additional resources, will create resentment among recruitment staff. In comparison, SLAs used to identify exemplars in State government and recreate best practices throughout the agencies may be received in a more positive light.*
- **Recommendation #3: Consider the creation of dedicated staff to take ownership of the hiring process:** A key takeaway from the task force was the lack of staff across all SPMS agencies solely dedicated to the hiring process to take ownership from start to finish. Most of the hiring process responsibilities fall on staff that have duties external to recruitment and hiring; hiring managers often run programs, supervise additional staff, and have their own assignments, while HR staff are also responsible for processing leave requests, assisting employees with benefit questions or changes, assisting managers with disciplinary procedures, inputting employee performance reviews, processing compensation changes, *etc.* The task force felt the lack of ownership over the hiring process from start to finish, and the lack of positions in some State agencies dedicated exclusively to the full cycle recruitment process, were contributors to the bottleneck in State hiring. While some larger agencies have recruitment staff, the creation of staff dedicated exclusively to the entire hiring process throughout SPMS agencies would allow staff to specialize and focus on recruitment activities and facilitate a more robust employee matching or referral process.
- *Considerations: Creating dedicated recruiters for all SPMS agencies would require significant investment and resources, including new positions and specialized training, which will take funding away from other priorities. The task force was also uncertain how these new positions or functions would be put to best use. Some members of the task force believed recruiters should be centralized to best facilitate applicant referrals and focused hiring activities. Some task force members believed these resources would be best used at the agencies, enabling them to focus on hard-to-recruit, specialized positions. There were also differences of opinion about how to incorporate this function in small agencies versus large agencies.*

## **Issues with the Applicant Experience**

In addition to focusing on ways to improve the hiring process from the perspective of the State as an employer, the task force agreed that the way applicants experience the State's hiring process was equally important. How applicants are treated throughout the hiring process influences their decisions on whether to apply, accept an offer, and refer other job seekers. A positive applicant experience makes candidates feel valued and sets the tone for how they may



be treated once they work for the State. On the other hand, a bad applicant experience will discourage job seekers from applying and negatively impact how the State is viewed as an employer.

The task force identified the following issues with the applicant experience, when applying to State government:

- applicants receive limited communication throughout the hiring process, creating uncertainty and a feeling of neglect;
- the State does not proactively direct applicants to job openings for which they qualify, resulting in applicants applying to the same positions across multiple agencies, creating frustration; and
- State job titles and job openings are difficult to navigate, leaving job seekers unsure about which roles they are interested in or for which they qualify.

### **Applicant Communication**

SPMS agencies conduct recruitment activities through a combination of Workday (the State's HR system) and JobAps (the State's online employment center). These systems have a variety of automated communications that agency staff can send throughout the hiring process. JobAps automatically sends a notice upon receipt of an application. Additionally, applicants receive notice of their rated scores or if they have been deemed unqualified for a position, as required by State law. All other notices and communications with applicants are optional and are manually generated by recruiting or HR staff.

A common complaint heard by the task force members in their roles as management, HR, and bargaining unit representatives is the lack of communication applicants receive throughout the hiring process. As demonstrated by Exhibit 1, under the State's current model, applicants do not typically receive communication for a month after initially applying for a job. After an interview, an applicant may wait another 3-4 weeks, or more, to hear whether they were chosen for the position. Once an applicant has been selected, notice to the remaining applicants that the position has been filled is a manual, optional part of the process. Often, the status of the job is not updated in JobAps, leaving applicants unsure if the job has been filled or if they are still under consideration.

### **Applicant Referral Process**

According to DBM Recruitment and Examination Division (RED), in calendar year 2022 the State received 154,000 applications from 62,500 unique applicants for 7,956 SPMS job openings. Despite receiving far more applications than job openings, the State continues to struggle to fill vacancies. With 90% of applicants not hired or redirected to other openings, the State is not making efficient use of thousands of people who want to work for the State of Maryland. Task force members reported hearing frustration from applicants having to apply for the same job classification across different agencies, or multiple job openings at the same

agency. Applicants who are not chosen for a particular opening must continuously reapply, experiencing repeated rejection, or receive no feedback at all on their application status.

The State has limited options to refer applicants to other job openings for which they may qualify without violating State law for competitive recruitments. Applicants who are not chosen for a position may be placed on an “eligibility list,” which hiring managers can pull applicants to interview from for up to a year; however, it is questionable if most applicants understand their status on this list and how many receive a call for another job opportunity. State agencies are not required, but encouraged, to share eligibility lists with other agencies after a job opening has closed. Several task force members expressed frustration at how siloed State agencies are when it comes to recruitment, viewing each other as competitors for talent rather than partners.

On September 19, 2023, the task force received a presentation on Amazon’s hiring process<sup>5</sup>. Amazon continuously accepts applications and tries to match qualified candidates to immediate job openings to fill positions with the best qualified candidates that are ready to be “hired now.” If an applicant is not determined to be a good fit for a certain role, or the role is filled, Amazon assigns the applicant to another group that also has an open role and moves them quickly through that hiring process. This referral of applicants to other similar roles eliminates the need for an applicant to submit multiple applications to the same company, and potentially experience repeated rejection and frustration.

The task force generally agreed the State needs to improve its applicant referral process and acknowledged the benefits of redirecting applicants to connect those who are ready to be “hired now” with current job openings; however, the task force also recognized the State has other priorities that may run counter to certain components of a referral process. State law requires recruitments to be competitive with the intention of reducing bias and increasing access to groups that have been traditionally disadvantaged job seekers. Any referral process would need to ensure the competitive hiring process remains intact.

## **Career Matching and Job Search**

In addition to an improved referral process, the task force also felt that job seekers may be struggling to determine what State jobs they are interested in and qualified for, prior to submitting the initial application. The State uses an extensive uniform job classification system to ensure equity and consistency of position duties and compensation of employees across the agencies. The State has over 3,000 job classifications for job seekers to navigate. Job classifications have strict minimum requirements and usually technical or unhelpful classification names. The State’s website does not allow prospective applicants to search for jobs based on their qualifications or their interests, resulting in applicants potentially clicking through hundreds of job openings to find more information.

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<sup>5</sup> Presentation to the Task Force on September 19, 2023, by Joel Martinez, Human Resources Director, Amazon.

On November 14, 2023, the task force received a presentation on a career assessment tool used by the District of Columbia (DC) government<sup>6</sup>. This presentation offered the task force an example of a technology the State could consider to help match prospective job seekers with available jobs. The tool asks the user to take a “career assessment,” which is designed to find out the individual’s areas of interest and preferences. The individual is then directed to potential career pathways, based on the results of their career assessment, and given detailed information on the education and skills required to obtain the position, programs that provide degrees or credentials required, the potential for career growth, average salaries, and existing job openings. While the career tool used by DC was primarily directed at public school students and adults educated through alternative pathways, the State could explore a similar tool or enhanced website functionality to better direct job seekers to State job openings based on their interests, skills, experience, and education.

### **Open/Continuous Job Postings**

The task force was asked to consider the use of open/continuous job postings to allow the State to continuously recruit for positions. DBM currently makes use of open/continuous job postings for positions with high vacancies and frequent turnover. The task force generally agreed that the current use of open/continuous job postings was appropriate and should continue to be used.

Several task force members raised the prospect of using a “common application process” to allow job seekers to submit applications to the State throughout the year, rather than to a specific job opening, as an expansion of the State’s current open/continuous job posting usage. According to DBM, a common application process was attempted years prior to allow applicants interested in State employment to apply and be referred to job openings to which they qualify. In practice, applicants on these common application lists were numerous and often were not contacted for job openings due to the sheer volume of applicants and limited staff available to sort through general applications. Several members of the task force supported the concept of a common application, but acknowledged the creation of such a process would require staffing and technological resources to ensure applicants are not left frustrated and ignored.

### **Recommendations to Improve the Applicant Experience**

- **Recommendation #4: Improve applicant engagement throughout the hiring process:**  
The task force agreed that the State should increase communication with applicants throughout the hiring process. The State should establish SLAs around communication after applications have been submitted to ensure applicants are receiving timely responses. Communication of the stages of the hiring process and timelines would better manage applicants’ expectations and reassure them that their application is progressing. The State needs to consider its reputation as an employer and treat applicants as “valued customers”, with the goal of providing excellent customer service. Applicants that feel valued during the

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<sup>6</sup> Presentation to the Task Force on November 14, 2023, by Kilin Boardman-Schroyer, Deputy Assistant Superintendent, Postsecondary and Career Education, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Government of the District of Columbia.

process are more likely to speak of the employer positively with other potential applicants and maintain enthusiasm for the State as a prospective employer.

- *Considerations: From a technology standpoint, improving communications with applicants will likely require updates of the State's current application systems, or potentially greater investment to modernize the State's systems. More engagement will also require efforts from staff to reach out to applicants throughout the hiring process, which may put pressure on HR and recruitment staff if additional support is not provided.*
  
- **Recommendation #5: Develop a “hire now” culture with an improved referral process:** The task force generally agreed the State should pursue a “hire now” culture, meaning that the State should attempt to refer or match applicants that have applied to other job openings. A better referral process would reduce the amount of time the State spends on reviewing and scoring applications from the same individual, and it would enable State agencies to move already scored and vetted applicants into vacant positions immediately. Having an effective referral process also sends the message to applicants that the State values them as a prospective employee and is working to bring them on board. The State currently allows agencies to share eligible candidate lists for job openings for the same classes, but more outreach and education would ensure agencies know how to make use of these lists. The task force suggested the State explore options to improve the State's referral process, including legislative changes, technology improvement, or use of a common application.
  
- *Considerations: There are several impediments in the State's current process and culture that would need to be changed to facilitate an effective referral process. State agencies are not required to share eligible applicant lists with other agencies recruiting for the same position types. Recruitment efforts are decentralized, resulting in agencies competing for the same talent pool, rather than acting as partners. Additionally, the State must take into consideration competitive hiring requirements when determining how best to implement a referral system. Several task force members indicated that their support for this recommendation would be dependent on the final design and details of how the referral process is implemented.*
  
- **Recommendation #6: Explore options to improve applicant career matching and job search:** The task force generally agreed that the State should improve career matching to help prospective job seekers better navigate the State's openings. The career assessment tool demonstrated to the task force is an example of the type of technology the State could consider to improve applicant matching; however, there are other potential solutions the State could explore to achieve this objective (e.g., updating the State's current website functionality, creating a dedicated referral office, etc.). The State should conduct a review of the current job website with more focus on improving user experience.
  
- *Considerations: Career assessments are designed to be broad to encompass many different job seekers. Several task force members indicated a preference for more targeted recruitment efforts rather than a broad focus. Instead of creating a tool to navigate the State's confusing job openings, the State could also attempt to align job openings with more recognizable industry standards.*

- **Recommendation #7: Expand use of open/continuous job postings:** The task force agreed that the State should continue to make use, and possibly expand the use, of open/continuous job postings for positions with frequent vacancies. There was mixed support on whether a common application, without being tied to a specific job opening, would be beneficial.
  
- *Considerations: To have an effective open/continuous job posting or common application process would require sufficient staffing to ensure that applications are reviewed, and applicants are engaged, in a timely fashion. The concern raised by several task members was the prospect of State agencies being overwhelmed with applications, and agency staff being unable to effectively refer applicants to job openings with current State resources.*

### III. Pursue Proactive Recruitment Strategies

#### Issues with Recruitment

The task force was asked to consider proactive recruitment strategies, including in high schools and in cooperation with workforce agency career counselors. The task force identified the following issues related to recruitment:

- current recruitment efforts are not attracting young job seekers;
- State agencies have limited options to use streamline hiring; and
- there is no dedicated funding for SPMS recruitment activities or marketing.

#### DBM Centralized Recruitment Efforts

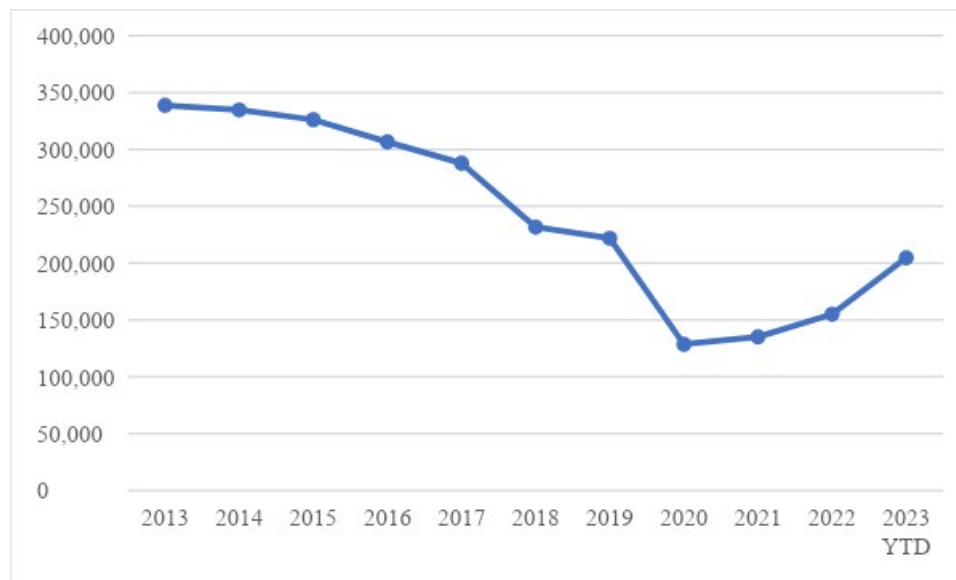
Centralized recruitment activities (*e.g.*, organizing job fairs, posting advertisements on social media, *etc.*) for SPMS agencies are conducted by DBM RED staff. DBM RED also provides full cycle recruiting for smaller agencies that were centralized as part of consolidation and as overflow for larger agencies when high volume occurs. The State does not currently provide funding for advertising activities in DBM; therefore, DBM and agency staff almost exclusively pursue recruitment activities that have no cost. Centralized marketing and advertising services provided by DBM for all SPMS agencies include the following:

- maintaining the State's job website:  
<https://dbm.maryland.gov/jobseekers/Pages/jobseekersHome.aspx>
- maintaining the JobAps Applicant Tracking System website: <https://jobapscloud.com/MD/>
- maintaining State jobs social media pages:
  - Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MarylandStateJobs>
  - Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/maryland.statejobs>
  - Twitter/X: <https://twitter.com/Marylandgovjobs>
  - LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/state-of-maryland>
- maintenance of multiple job posting boards, association sites and advertising venue accounts (*e.g.*, Indeed, ZipRecruiter, Monster, Publicservicecareer, Dice, Imdiversity, Diversity.com); and
- creative assistance in ad composition, social media content, media recommendations and targeted marketing.

SPMS agencies may also maintain their own social media pages and websites where they post job openings and may employ a range of recruiting strategies outside of a coordinated statewide effort. These efforts vary based on resource availability in each individual agency.

SPMS agencies have experienced a decline in applications for seven consecutive years, starting with a peak of 338,720 applications in calendar 2013 and ending with a low of 128,491 applications in calendar 2020, as shown in **Exhibit 3**. Applications started to rebound slowly in calendar 2021 and 2022; however, calendar 2023 is the first time the State has surpassed 200,000 applications since calendar 2019, with 1 month remaining in the year.

**Exhibit 3**  
**Applications Received for SPMS Job Openings**  
**Calendar 2013 – November 15, 2023**



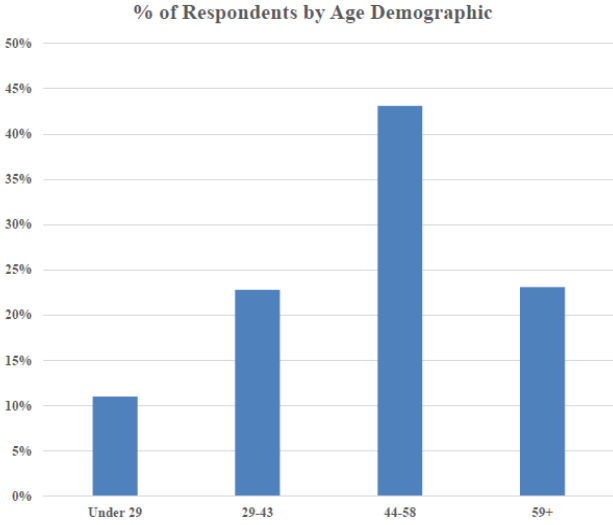
SPMS: State Personnel Management System

Note: Calendar 2023 year-to-date includes applications received from January 1, 2023, through November 15, 2023.

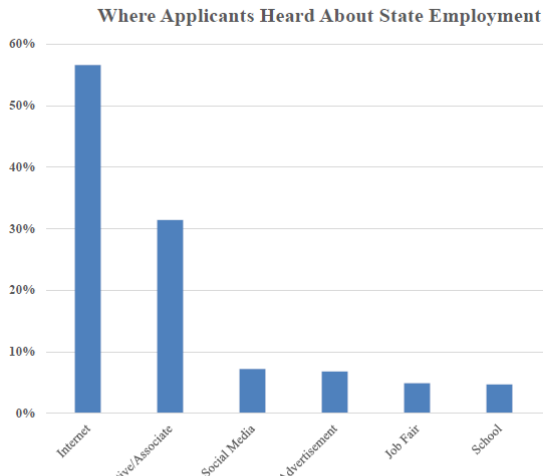
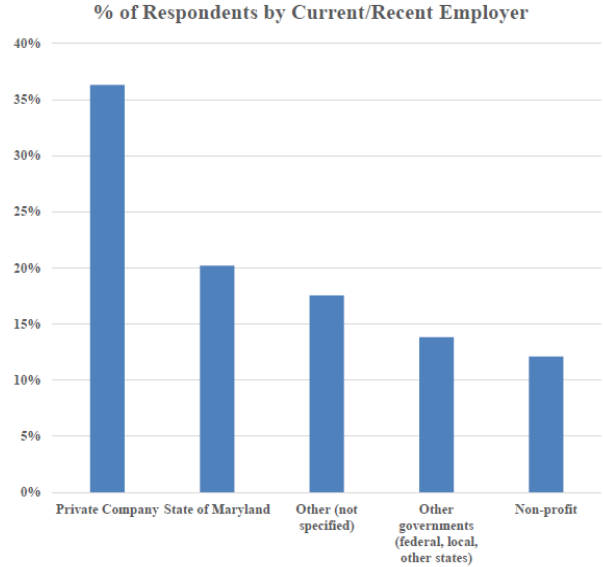
Source: Department of Budget and Management

On October 17, 2023, the task force was provided with summary results from the SPMS Applicant Survey collected by DBM from prospective hires from January 1, 2023, through October 5, 2023, as shown in **Exhibit 4** below. The top demographic of applicants to the State during this time were ages 44-58 and came primarily from the private sector or were existing State employees. The top sources applicants heard about State job openings were through the “internet” (which DBM has interpreted as the State’s job website), or from a friend, relative or associate. The top reasons why the respondents were attracted to State jobs were stability and meaningful work. The task force made note of the ages of most State applicants and expressed a desire to attract more young workers to State government.

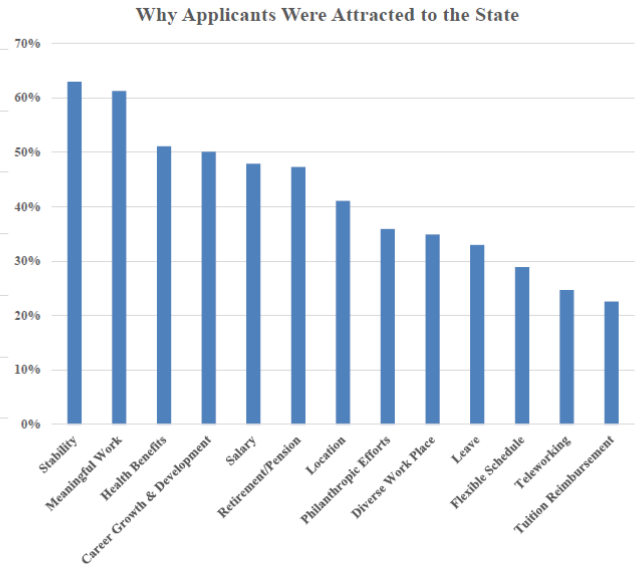
## Exhibit 4 SPMS Applicant Survey Information January 1, 2023 – October 5, 2023



\*Reflects 1,859 total respondents



\*Reflects 1,859 respondents. Multiple answers were possible.



SPMS: State Personnel Management System  
Source: DBM Applicant Survey Results from January 1, 2023, through October 5, 2023.



## One-Day Hiring Events

The task force received a presentation on DPSCS' use of one-day hiring events<sup>7</sup>. DPSCS has found the one-day hiring events an efficient way to identify, engage, and recruit quickly, particularly for job classes with high vacancies. DPSCS has made most use of these hiring events to address vacancies with correctional officers; however, the department's recent focus has been on administrative vacancies within correctional facilities.

DPSCS identified the following benefits of one-day hiring events:

- **Efficiency:** the condensed timeline and streamlined process accelerates hiring.
- **Candidate engagement:** the event format creates an interactive and engaging experience for candidates.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** reduce costs associated with prolonged hiring processes.
- **Talent pool expansion:** attracts a diverse range of talent in one day.
- **Departmental branding:** showcases the department's commitment to recruitment and employee development.
- **Partnerships:** fostering relationships with communities and other State agencies.

DPSCS acknowledges the events are a heavy lift for recruitment staff to prepare the welcome and information sessions, on-site applications, interview panels, skills assessment, screening processes, and background initiation all on the same day; however, DPSCS has seen success because of one-day hiring events. For instance, an April 22, 2023, one-day hiring event resulted in 181 conditional offers for administrative positions at DPSCS, and 47 (26%) of these candidates accepted positions with the department. The vacancy rate for DPSCS administrative positions has dropped from 239 vacancies (22.6%) as of May 2023, to 143 vacancies (13.1%) as of October 2023.

The task force was generally supportive of the State expanding one-day hiring events; however, several task force members pointed out the limitations of these hiring events due to the required competitive hiring process. The State has been allowing a streamlined hiring process since March 2022 for job classifications that have vacancy rates higher than the State's overall SPMS vacancy rate. This streamlined process allows DPSCS to make conditional job offers on-site at one-day hiring events. As the State fills vacant positions, fewer job classifications will be eligible for streamlined hiring, and instead would need to go through the required competitive recruitment process. State agencies would then be prohibited from making conditional offers at hiring events. Instead, the focus would need to change to assist applicants with applying to

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<sup>7</sup> Presentation on October 17, 2023, from Tara Nelson, Human Resources Director, Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

current job openings, which is less expedient than a one-day hiring event where an applicant can leave the event with a conditional job offer.

The task force did not have any specific recommendations related to one-day hiring events but acknowledged the difficulty of reconciling the advantages of streamlined hiring with adhering to the competitive hiring process as required by State law.

## **MDOT Recruitment Campaign**

On July 21, 2023, MDOT launched a first-of-its-kind recruitment marketing campaign to help reduce vacancies, called “Taking You Places!”. The campaign included traditional and digital media and spanned a four-month period<sup>8</sup>. MDOT identified the following strategy/goals for their recruitment campaign:

- humanize MDOT by using MDOT employees in real jobs, highlighting what they like most about public service;
- promote MDOT as an employer of choice;
- recruit for skilled trades and other difficult-to-fill positions;
- attract younger demographic to State service;
- promote benefits of public service;
- reduce MDOT vacancy rate by 50% by the end of 2023; and
- educate all Marylanders about the variety of transportation-related jobs available.

MDOT’s campaign targeted adults aged 25-49 to attract younger workers, an identified priority group given MDOT’s aging workforce (25% are eligible for retirement or will be in the next few years). MDOT utilized the following marketing techniques during the campaign:

- traditional and digital marketing;
- paid and organic social media;
- digital audio (streaming radio) and spot radio focused on reaching skilled trades audience (98 Rock);
- Baltimore Orioles partnership;
- short-form videos for cable and broadcast television;

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<sup>8</sup> Presentation to the Task Force on October 17, 2023, by Jawauna Greene, Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs and Strategy, Maryland Department of Transportation

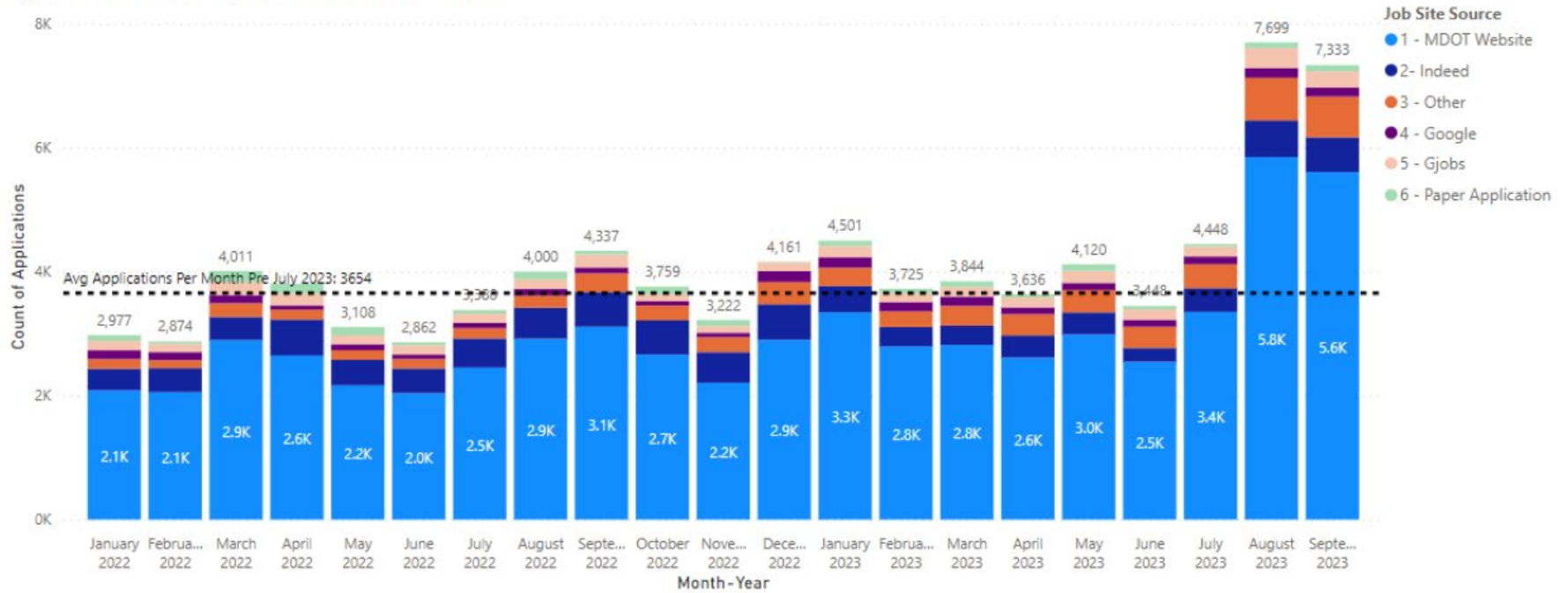
- print publications;
- Spanish language digital marketing and streaming radio; and
- billboards.

As a result of this campaign, MDOT was able to double job applicants, as shown by **Exhibit 5**. From July 24, 2023, through September 30, 2023, MDOT has seen paid digital media deliver 29,648 clicks to the MDOT website, with an average click through rate of 0.87%, in comparison to the national average of 0.16%. Paid social media ads had 2,070 post engagements and have sent 17,863 people to their website. According to MDOT, this advertising campaign cost \$598,000, including the cost of production and ad buying.

## Exhibit 5

### MDOT Preliminary Results of Advertising Campaign Applications Submitted by Month and Job Site Source

Applications Submitted by Month and Job Site Source



MDOT: Maryland Department of Transportation  
 Source: Maryland Department of Transportation

In July 2023, MDOT’s vacancy rate was 10.2%. In November 2023, following the campaign, MDOT’s vacancy rate was reduced to 7.6%. The task force was impressed with MDOT’s initiative and agreed the benefits of the marketing campaign were obvious. The task force generally agreed dedicated recruitment funding and a comprehensive strategy for SPMS agencies, like MDOT’s campaign, would increase the public exposure of State jobs and likely increase applications; however, some task force members noted that the State already receives more applicants than job openings.

## Recommendations to Pursue Proactive Recruitment Strategies

- **Recommendation #8: Consider additional funding options for recruitment activities and marketing:** MDOT’s results from their marketing campaign show that strategic advertising and marketing does result in an increase in applications. Unlike MDOT, there is no comparable funding for this type of campaign for SPMS agencies.
- *Considerations: Any additional funding for recruitment efforts will need to weigh against other State government priorities. Additionally, the State may want to consider if advertising is the top priority, considering the State currently receives more applicants than necessary to fill existing job openings. Several task force members indicated that additional funding for recruitment activities should require ongoing reviews to determine the effectiveness of advertising campaigns.*

## IV. Improve Job Attractiveness

DBM provides the centralized platform for SPMS State agencies’ job information, including available openings, benefits of State employment, hiring event announcements, *etc.*<sup>9</sup> SPMS actual job openings are posted using the State’s recruitment vendor, JobAps<sup>10</sup>. In addition to current job openings, job seekers have access to the State’s class specification list to review job descriptions and requirements<sup>11</sup>. The task force was asked to consider ways the State could make jobs more attractive to prospective applicants.

### Issues with Job Attractiveness

The task force made the following observations about the State’s job classifications and postings:

- job classification titles are vague and do not offer insight into what the job actually entails;
- agencies use the same job classification for totally different jobs; and
- job postings are wordy, uninspiring, and do not highlight the benefits of State employment.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://dbm.maryland.gov/jobseekers/Pages/jobseekersHome.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> <https://jobapscloud.com/MD/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.jobapscloud.com/MD/auditor/classspecs.asp>

## Job Classifications

SPMS agencies share a uniform and competitive classification and compensation system from which all employees are hired into. According to SPP Section 4-203(b):

(1) each employee in a position shall assume the classification title given to the class to which that position belongs.

(2) the Secretary (of DBM), the Comptroller, and the Treasurer shall use these classification titles in all relevant records and communications.

An employee's classification and associated job code may indicate if an employee is or is not a special appointment. These distinctions also determine which bargaining unit an employee belongs to, and which employee union represents them. Some classifications are used statewide for functions applicable at multiple State agencies (*e.g.*, office secretary, administrative officer) while some classifications are unique to a particular agency (*e.g.*, agricultural inspector).

As mentioned previously, the job classification system is designed to ensure uniformity and equity when it comes to job duties and compensation for employees in the same job class. While this uniformity can make certain processes easier (*e.g.*, bargaining unit identification, reclassification and promotion procedures, *etc.*), the classification title often does not offer clarity into the role of the position. For instance, **Exhibit 6** provides a snapshot of eight job openings for Administrator positions from the State's job website. The role for each Administrator job opening varies considerably, with "planners," "coordinators," "policy analysts," "compliance officers," *etc.* State agencies are encouraged to use a "working" or "business" title in addition to the job classification titles to provide more clarity on what the position does. As you can see from Exhibit 6, the Administrator job openings are vague and varied, without the addition of the working title to provide some insight into the role.

**Exhibit 6**  
**Administrator Job Openings on DBM's Website**  
**November 2023**

| Job Title   | Work Locations | Agency  |
|---|----------------|---|
| <b>ADMINISTRATOR I (Emergency &amp; Grant Planner)</b><br>23-002586-0131    | Baltimore City | DHS - Ops Ofc - Div of Administrative Services  |
| <b>ADMINISTRATOR I (Project Manager)</b><br>23-002586-0134                  | Baltimore City | DHS Child Support Enforcement Administration    |
| <b>ADMINISTRATOR I</b><br><b>NEW</b><br>23-002586-0137                      | Anne Arundel   | MCA General Administration                      |
| <b>ADMINISTRATOR II (Repost) (DBT Coordinator)</b><br>23-002587-0068        | Frederick      | DJS Victor Cullen                               |
| <b>ADMINISTRATOR III (EEO Compliance Officer)</b><br>23-002588-0128         | Baltimore City | DBM OPSB Executive Direction                    |
| <b>ADMINISTRATOR IV (DBT Program Supervisor (Repost))</b><br>23-002589-0038 | Frederick      | DJS Victor Cullen                               |
| <b>ADMINISTRATOR IV (Policy Analyst)</b><br>23-002589-0044                  | Baltimore City | LABOR Workforce Dev - Ofc of the Asst Secy      |
| <b>ADMINISTRATOR IV ***REPOST*** (POLICY ANALYST)</b><br>23-002589-0023     | Anne Arundel   | MDH Health Professionals Boards and Commissions |

DBM: Department of Budget and Management  
Source: <https://jobapscloud.com/MD/>

In addition to job classifications being vague or unhelpful, agencies use the same job titles for totally different jobs across State government. For instance, an Administrative Officer II may be advertised as a payroll officer, an executive assistant, a special assistant, a background investigator, and a crime prevention and community policing specialist, despite all being the same job classification. The task force agrees that job openings that only post the job classification title are not as helpful as postings that incorporate the working or business title.

Several task force members also pointed out that, in addition to updating job titles, position descriptions and the duties of the jobs themselves should also be reviewed. Job postings with outdated or confusing position descriptions are a deterrent to applicants. Several task force members suggested the State work more closely with employees and employee unions to review and update job titles, position descriptions, and the job duties (as needed).

## **Job Postings**

Job postings, or announcements, play an important role in an employer's ability to attract talent. If the posting does not compel job seekers to apply, looks outdated, or boring, it will discourage prospective applicants. SPP Section 7-204 lists the requirements for a State job announcement as follows:

- a summary of the position description;
- the minimum qualifications for the class and any selective qualifications necessary for consideration;
- the type of selection test that will be administered to those meeting the position's minimum qualifications;
- the location and deadline for submitting applications; and
- the duration of the list of eligibles derived from the announcement.

The State uses JobAps to post job openings on the DBM website, which means most job openings end up using the same template. Job openings tend to focus on providing all the information required by law, rather than the benefits of working for the State or how the role serves the people of Maryland. The task force felt that the information required by State law was necessary to ensure applicants were well informed; but did not feel the law limited State agencies from getting more creative with their job openings to make them more attractive. Additionally, while certain sections will be unvaried due to requirements in statute and the job classification (*e.g.*, minimum qualifications, licenses or certifications required, selection process, *etc.*), agencies could get more creative in describing the purpose of the job and highlighting how the job provides a public service.

## **Choosing Job Titles**

On October 31, 2023, the task force received a presentation on MDOT's recent efforts to update job titles<sup>12</sup>. Choosing the right job title is an important part of the recruiting and hiring process, since the job title is the first thing applicants see when they are searching for jobs. The job title could determine whether a candidate clicks on a job posting or scrolls past it. MDOT offered the following best practices when considering job titles:

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<sup>12</sup> Presentation on October 31, 2023, from Lissette Smith, Human Resources Director, Maryland Department of Transportation.



- **Pick a job title that is industry-relevant:** selecting a job title that already exists in a specific industry and is recognizable improves the applicant pool significantly.
- **Appeal to the right candidates:** determine exactly how much experience you want the applicants to have and keep that in mind when choosing the job title. Research what other agencies are calling entry-, mid-, and executive level positions, and follow suit.
- **Match the job title to salary expectations:** avoid mismatching job titles and salary expectations. For example, if you are planning to offer a \$40,000 salary for your open position in business development, do not advertise the job as a Director of Business Development.

The task force was supportive of the best practices identified by MDOT. DBM indicated that SPMS agencies were being encouraged to use working titles versus job classifications, but more work was needed to encourage the shift in agency culture.

### **Recommendation to Improve Job Attractiveness**

- **Recommendation #9: Expand efforts to update job titles to make job postings more attractive:** The task force was supportive of SPMS agencies following MDOT's best practices to update and use working titles for positions instead of job classification titles, which are vague and confusing to job seekers. Some task force members felt employee input into job titles would be valuable, particularly upon initial hiring and follow-up performance reviews.
- *Considerations: Several task force members pointed out that job titles needed to match the position description and actual duties of the jobs, and all these areas should be reviewed and updated at the same time.*

## **V. Expand Career Ladders and Pathways**

Career ladders are the pathways or progressions by which an employee can grow from an entry-level position to higher positions. A career ladder provides employees with an outline of how they can grow in their career, and what steps they need to take to reach the next level. In the State, employees can grow in their careers by the following methods:

- **Promotion:** many employees are eligible for non-competitive promotions (NCP) to higher-level classifications within their current job classification series that offers career progression from the trainee level to the full performance level of work. According to DBM Classification and Salary (CAS), there are approximately 450 NCP classification series in SPMS.
- **Transfer:** employees can transfer to other departments or agencies. While a transfer does not result in a high job classification, it can be an excellent way for an employee to gain new skills and experience.

- **Reclassification:** agencies can request a reclassification or a job study if the current job duties and responsibilities of a position exceed the scope of its current job classification.
- **Promoting to higher-level classification opportunities:** employees may be promoted to supervisory or managerial levels of work. There are also lead, advanced, or expert levels of work that are non-supervisory positions.

Having career ladders with multiple steps is an excellent retention tool to give employees a clear and achievable path to growth, both in skills and compensation. Growth opportunities also improve succession planning by developing and preparing staff to transition to higher-level roles as leadership and management retire. The task force was asked to consider:

- expanding career ladders, beginning with a low experience level, and integrating on-the-job and classroom training; and
- sponsorship of registered apprenticeships.

### **Issues with Career Ladders**

The task force identified the following issues with the State's current career ladders:

- certain job series do not offer sufficient career progression to encourage employee retention; and
- on-the-job training for entry-level jobs and the establishment of talent pipelines is lacking.

### **Career Progression**

The task force discussed a variety of issues when discussing the State's career progression options. Several task force members indicated many jobs lacked sufficient advancement opportunities, without requiring an employee to take on a supervisory role. Not all SPMS classifications provide multiple series (*e.g.*, levels I, II, III) or lead/advanced roles, which can result in employees hitting a ceiling in their job classification, unless they pursue a different role.

Another issue the task force discussed was career ladders that were not clearly connected, simply by looking at the job classification. For instance, an administrative aide could progress to a management associate, but nothing in the job title indicates this progression. Additionally, an administrative specialist could progress to an administrative officer, and eventually an administrator position through experience, but the administrative specialist is not advertised as an entry-level job for the administrator series. The task force agreed that job classifications and postings should make career progression clearer to job seekers.

## Entry-level Jobs

Another issue identified by the task force is the lack of on-the-job training for entry-level employees, as well as existing employees seeking to grow in their careers. Several task force members expressed support for increased employee training; however, it was acknowledged that training budgets were largely eliminated in prior years due to operating budget deficits. The State would need to consider how much funding training efforts should receive, and how to pay for this cost, given the competing State priorities for funding.

## Talent Pipelines

In addition to entry-level jobs, several task force members expressed concerns over talent pipelines for certain jobs. For instance, health care workers are in high demand, leaving the State to compete with the private sector for the same, limited pool of talent. Therefore, several task force members supported the idea that the State could explore options to create talent pipelines and expand these labor pools through greater use of paid internships, tuition reimbursement, on-the-job training, incentive bonuses, *etc.*

The task force highlighted the Governor's Service Year Option as a notable example of the State developing talent pipelines. Established by the Serving Every Region Through Vocational Exploration (SERVE) Act of 2023 with the purpose of promoting service and volunteerism in the State, the SERVE Act launched two new service pathways for eligible youth and adults:

- **The Service Year Option** (for young adults within three years of graduation from high school) is an opportunity for those who recently completed high school, received their high school completion certificate, or earned their GED in Maryland; and
- **Maryland Corps** (for any adult) is an opportunity for people of all ages interested in performing public and community service in Maryland.

Members of both programs work in diverse organizations, which provide on-the-job training and professional development, with the goal of preparing participants for the transition to college, trade school, apprenticeship, or a career. The first cohort of more than 250 members started in October 2023, some of whom are serving in State agencies. The task force felt this program provided an excellent bridge to State employment, particularly for younger workers lacking professional or specific experience required by State jobs. The SERVE Act calls for an expansion of the program to 4,000 members by the fourth year of the program, and the task force felt this was a worthwhile endeavor to develop new, more diverse, and younger talent pools eager to serve in State government.

## Apprenticeships

The task force was asked to consider State sponsorship of registered apprenticeships, as part of its charge. The task force received a presentation on the possibilities of expanding

registered apprenticeships throughout State government<sup>13</sup>. The Maryland Department of Labor (Labor) provided an overview of registered apprenticeships and the benefits of such programs, which include:

- **Customizable training:** employers have full freedom to build training programs that are nationally recognized and flexible to the employer’s needs.
- **Improved retention:** registered apprenticeship has been demonstrated to increase retention for employees who start as apprentices.
- **Better wage outcomes:** workers who start as apprentices earn more on average than workers who never participate in registered apprenticeships.
- **Incentives and support:** registered apprenticeship programs are often eligible for State and federal tax credits, grant programs, and incentives, which can help employers and sponsors offset the cost of training apprentices and administering the program.

Labor also provided an overview of how State agencies can apply to the newly awarded Public Sector Registered Apprenticeship Innovation Fund, which will open to State agencies in late 2023 and last until June 2026, subject to funding availability. Labor provided the task force with examples of State apprenticeships already established: bus maintenance positions at MDOT Maryland Transit Administration, and police officers at the Department of Natural Resources.

Labor has been working very closely with DBM to create a uniform process for State agencies to establish registered apprenticeships and apply for the Public Sector Registered Apprenticeship Innovation Fund. DBM has worked with multiple agencies, including DPSCS, the Maryland Department of Health, State Department of Assessments and Taxation, Department of General Services, and community college representatives to explore registered apprenticeship opportunities. The State must negotiate any proposed registered apprenticeships with employee unions. Establishment of apprenticeships will likely require additional positions and funding associated with the required components of a program (*e.g.* on-the-job training, education, *etc.*).

## **Recommendation to Expand Career Ladders and Pathways**

- **Recommendation #10: Explore opportunities to expand career ladders and alternative career pathways, including the creation of registered apprenticeships:** The task force supported the State exploring options to expand career ladders, including opportunities to add progressions in existing classifications to allow for continued growth. Several task force members also highlighted the importance of State agencies processing non-competitive promotions (NCPs) timely once employees meet the requirements to improve retention. The task force was also generally supportive of the State’s continued exploration of alternative career pathways, such as the Governor’s Service Year Option, and the creation of registered apprenticeships, with a few caveats.

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<sup>13</sup> Presentation on October 31, 2023, by Logan Dean, Program Manager, Apprenticeship and Training Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning, Maryland Department of Labor.

- *Considerations: Several task force members indicated they supported the idea of expanded career growth, increased on-the-job training, and establishment of registered apprenticeships to promote alternative career pathways and grow the talent pipeline; however, they also acknowledged all these ideas would require significant investment. Additional positions, increased compensation, and training resources would likely be necessary to pursue this recommendation. Some task force members also hesitated to give full support on the creation of registered apprenticeships without having specific program designs to consider.*

## **VI. Review Job Requirements**

The task force was asked to review degree requirements and consider whether the State should focus applicant requirements on skills, rather than degrees. The task force identified the following issues with job requirements:

- degrees act as obstacles for certain applicant pools; and
- hiring managers experience a lack of flexibility over job requirements.

### **Degree Requirements**

In response to concerns over degree bias acting as a blocker to State employment, DBM has been reviewing the minimum qualifications for SPMS job classifications. Since January 2023, DBM CAS has reduced or broadened minimum qualifications for over 100 job classifications, allowing greater access to State employment to applicants that previously would not have qualified. DBM CAS has conducted expedited review of requests to lower minimum qualifications, which include:

- providing experience substitutions for a college degree;
- making reductions in the required years of experience; and
- adding new relevant job experience substitutions.

DBM CAS has made positions with high vacancy rates a top priority for these efforts. Additionally, DBM CAS has been evaluating trainee-level classifications that require multiple years of experience in lieu of a college degree for reduction possibilities. DBM CAS is continuing its ongoing efforts to remove artificial barriers to employment for all classes.

Several task force members expressed support for the removal of degree blockers. Labor indicated an increase in applicants for hard-to-fill positions, which they attributed to the removal of the degree requirements. Additionally, applicants without degrees tend to be younger, which the task force agreed the State should try to improve recruitment and retention of younger workers. Several task force members had reservations over the removal of degree requirements

expressing concern for the quality of the employees once degree requirements were removed. Other task members were concerned that reducing minimum qualifications, or eliminating degree requirements, may depress wages for incoming and existing employees in certain job classifications. Finally, some task force members indicated degree requirements were essential to certain functions, and the elimination of this requirement for certain positions could pose a risk to health or safety.

### **Inflexibility of Job Requirements**

Several task force members indicated frustration with the lack of flexibility when it came to minimum hiring requirements for certain roles. While agencies may have some input and authority to alter the minimum requirements of agency-specific roles, agencies have little to no authority over the minimum qualifications of statewide roles. These minimum qualifications make it difficult or impossible to hire someone with alternative work experience, transferable skills, or alternative education. These requirements also make it difficult to tailor openings to agencies' specific needs, particularly when they are seeking applicants with unique experiences, education or skill sets. Several task force members expressed support for agencies having greater flexibility over job requirements and indicated that review of job requirements conducted by DBM CAS should be done in conjunction with subject matter experts at the agencies and the exclusive bargaining representatives per their respective memorandums of understanding.

### **Recommendation to Review Job Requirements**

- **Recommendation #11: Continue efforts to remove degree blockers and review job requirements to make State jobs more accessible:** The task force was generally supportive of the State's continued efforts to remove degree blockers and review job requirements, with a few caveats.
- *Considerations: Several task force members indicated a concern for the quality of the employees once degree requirements were removed. Other task members were concerned that reducing minimum qualifications, or eliminating degree requirements, may depress wages for incoming and existing employees in certain job classifications. Finally, some task force members indicated degree requirements were essential to certain functions, and the elimination of this requirement for certain positions could pose a risk to health or safety.*

## **VII. Conclusion**

The task force has made a good faith effort to address all the topics identified by the Maryland General Assembly but acknowledges that there are still many topics yet to be discussed. The task force identified further review of the statutory requirements that govern the State's hiring process as an area that should be pursued to complement the process changes identified by the task force. A comprehensive review of the statute will require stakeholders to discuss options that will allow for a more streamlined hiring process while adhering to competitive recruitment requirements, balancing the need to make State hiring more efficient with the goal of hiring without bias and increasing access to State employment for certain disadvantaged job seekers. The State should also engage in discussions on how to modernize the

State's hiring systems to improve recruitment and retention efforts. Though not part of the task force's specific charge, the task force also felt that the State should consider opportunities to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in the hiring process, as well as the State's existing workforce. The task force was unable to devote sufficient time to satisfactorily address these major issues, but future workgroups should give them the consideration they deserve.

DBM should take the next steps to review the recommendations of the task force and create an implementation plan. The task force acknowledged that implementing many of these recommendations will only be successful with additional resources and funding which will need to be weighed against other budget priorities.

## **VIII. Summary of the Recommendations**

### **Recommendations to Improve the Hiring Process**

- Recommendation #1: Encourage continuous applicant ratings during the job posting period.
- Recommendation #2: Establish service level agreements for the hiring process.
- Recommendation #3: Consider the creation of dedicated staff to take ownership of the hiring process.

### **Recommendations to Improve the Applicant Experience**

- Recommendation #4: Improve applicant engagement throughout the hiring process.
- Recommendation #5: Develop a “hire now” culture with an improved referral process.
- Recommendation #6: Explore options to improve applicant career matching and job search.
- Recommendation #7: Expand use of open/continuous job postings.

### **Recommendations to Pursue Proactive Recruitment Strategies**

- Recommendation #8: Consider additional funding options for recruitment activities and marketing.

### **Recommendation to Improve Job Attractiveness**

- Recommendation #9: Expand efforts to update job titles to make job postings more attractive.

### **Recommendation to Expand Career Ladders**

- Recommendation #10: Explore opportunities to expand career ladders and for alternative career pathways, including and the creation of registered apprenticeships.

### **Recommendation to Review Job Requirements**

- Recommendation #11: Continue efforts to remove degree blockers and review job requirements to make State jobs more accessible.



**Appendix 1**  
**State Personnel and Pensions Article**  
**Section 7-201 through 7-209**

§7-201.

(a) (1) This subtitle does not apply to a special appointment position in the skilled service or professional service.

(2) (i) This subtitle does not apply to the recruitment for or the appointment to a position in the skilled service or professional service if the appointing authority:

1. decides to recruit for the position under § 7-203(2) of this subtitle;
2. demonstrates that the position, based on the position description, is difficult to fill;
3. demonstrates that the recruitment must occur in a timely manner; and
4. notifies the Department of the recruitment.

(ii) A recruitment and appointment under this paragraph shall occur in accordance with regulations adopted by the Department.

(iii) 1. The Department shall adopt regulations to implement this paragraph.

2. The regulations adopted under this subparagraph shall provide, at a minimum, that for positions designated as special appointments on January 1, 2009, an appointing authority shall retain the same recruitment authority that the appointing authority possessed on January 1, 2009.

(b) Each unit shall fill vacant skilled service and professional service positions in accordance with a position selection plan.

(c) To ensure compliance with State and federal employment laws and to ensure consistency in recruitment and hiring practices in the State Personnel Management System, the Department shall:

(1) assist units in developing application forms, position selection plans, selection tests, and announcement forms; and

(2) review and audit recruitment and hiring practices of all appointing authorities at least once every 3 years.

(d) On request of a unit that is not able to conduct all or part of its own recruitment or selection testing for a position because it lacks the appropriate resources, the Department, consistent with its resources, shall assist the unit in conducting the requested recruitment and selection testing.

§7–202.

(a) When a skilled service or professional service position is to be filled, the unit shall complete a position selection plan for the position.

(b) A position selection plan shall contain the information about the position that the Secretary requires, including:

(1) a position description described in § 7–102 of this title;

(2) the minimum qualifications for the class of the position and any selective qualifications required for appointment to the position;

(3) any limitations on selection for the position, including those that limit consideration to:

(i) current State or unit employees;

(ii) current contractual employees;

(iii) promotional candidates; or

(iv) candidates indicating a willingness to work in a location; and

(4) if applicants for the position are to be recruited, the:

(i) location for submitting applications;

(ii) manner for posting the position announcement in the unit;

(iii) method and length of time for advertising the position;

(iv) closing date to receive applications for the position;

(v) plan of development of any selection test to be administered to qualified applicants;  
and

(vi) duration of the list of eligibles that results from the recruitment.

(c) The appointing authority shall:

(1) approve or disapprove each position selection plan;

(2) authorize funding for approved plans; and

(3) send a copy of an approved selection plan to the equal employment opportunity officer of the unit.

§7-203.

(a) An appointing authority may select candidates for a position:

(1) from an existing list of eligible candidates;

(2) if the appointing authority decides to recruit for the position, by recruitment;

(3) from a special list of eligible candidates whom the Division of Rehabilitation Services of the Department of Education certifies as being physically capable and adequately trained to qualify for the position;

(4) from a list of contractual employees performing the same or similar duties of the position; or

(5) as provided in subsection (b) of this section.

(b) (1) An appointing authority may select a disabled veteran for a position if:

(i) the disabled veteran:

1. served in any branch of the armed forces of the United States; and

2. A. is included on a United States armed forces permanent disability list with a disability rating of at least 30%; or

B. has been rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as having a compensable service-connected disability of at least 30%;

(ii) the disabled veteran presents to the appointing authority written documentation:

1. issued by an appropriate department of the federal government within the year preceding selection; and

2. certifying the existence and extent of the veteran's disability;

(iii) the appointing authority determines that the disabled veteran is qualified to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position;

(iv) the appointing authority notifies the Secretary in writing that the position is to be filled by a disabled veteran on a noncompetitive basis in accordance with this subsection; and

(v) the disabled veteran does not hold a permanent appointment or have mandatory

reinstatement rights to a permanent appointment.

(2) The requirements of § 7–209 of this subtitle do not apply to a disabled veteran selected for a vacant position under paragraph (1) of this subsection.

(3) If an appointing authority elects to select a disabled veteran for a vacant position under paragraph (1) of this subsection, the appointing authority may interview any disabled veteran who:

(i) has expressed an interest to the appointing authority in applying for the position; and

(ii) satisfies the requirements under paragraph (1) of this subsection.

(4) Except as provided in paragraph (3) of this subsection, if an appointing authority elects to select a disabled veteran for a vacant position under paragraph (1) of this subsection, the appointing authority is not required to interview any other qualified applicants for appointment to the position.

(5) This subsection does not require an appointing authority to select a disabled veteran for a vacant position or prohibit an appointing authority from filling a vacant position in accordance with the requirements of this subtitle.

§7–204.

(a) To recruit candidates for a position, an appointing authority shall prepare a job announcement for the position and conduct recruitment in accordance with the position selection plan.

(b) A job announcement shall contain:

(1) a summary of the position description;

(2) the minimum qualifications for the class and any selective qualifications necessary for consideration;

(3) the type of selection test that will be administered to those meeting the position's minimum qualifications;

(4) the location and deadline for submitting applications; and

(5) the duration of the list of eligibles derived from the announcement.

(c) For a vacant position under this subtitle, the appointing authority shall:

(1) send a copy of the selection plan and job announcement to the Secretary at least 1 week before posting the job announcement to assure public access;

(2) if current employees or contractual employees in the unit may be eligible for the position:

(i) post the job announcement for at least 2 weeks before the deadline for submitting applications, in at least one centralized location in that unit that is accessible to all employees; and

(ii) use any other method reasonably calculated to give eligible employees notice of the vacancy; and

(3) advertise the position vacancy at least 2 weeks before the deadline for submitting applications by:

(i) making available a job announcement to all appropriate State agencies, based on selection limitations; and

(ii) using any other method that is reasonably calculated to ensure a sufficient pool of applicants, including printed advertisements in newspapers and journals, paper and electronic bulletin board postings, and special notices.

§7-205.

(a) After the close of a position announcement, the appointing authority shall:

(1) review the applications received to determine the applicants who meet the minimum qualifications for the position;

(2) prepare a register of qualified applicants in random order;

(3) send to unqualified applicants a notice that they have failed to meet the minimum qualifications for the position; and

(4) except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, if a competitive examination that requires attendance at a test site is required for the position, send a notice of the examination to qualified applicants on the register at least 10 days before the test administration date.

(b) If less than ten but more than two applicants meet the minimum requirements for a position, the appointing authority may:

(1) make a selection from the register without the need for further selection testing; or

(2) readvertise the position vacancy.

§7-206.

(a) (1) An appointing authority may use any appropriate selection process to rate qualified applicants.

(2) A unit must be able to establish the job relatedness, reliability, and validity of the selection tests that it uses.

(b) (1) A selection test must be:

(i) free of charge; and

(ii) except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, open to all qualified applicants.

(2) An appointing authority:

(i) may disqualify and refuse to examine an otherwise qualified applicant who intentionally falsified information in the application; and

(ii) shall give the applicant a written notice of the reason for the proposed disqualification.

(3) An applicant who is disqualified under this subsection may submit a written response to the notice.

§7-207.

(a) A credit under this section shall be applied to an applicant's score on any selection test administered to establish placement on a list of eligible candidates for which the applicant otherwise is qualified and has at least the minimum passing score on a selection test.

(b) For a current State employee, an appointing authority shall apply a credit on a selection test, of one-quarter point for each year of service in State government, up to a maximum of five points for 20 years of State service.

(c) (1) In this subsection, "eligible veteran" means a veteran of any branch of the armed forces of the United States who has received an honorable discharge or a certificate of satisfactory completion of military service, including the National Guard and the military reserves.

(2) (i) An appointing authority shall apply a credit of ten points on any selection test for:

1. an eligible veteran;

2. the spouse of an eligible veteran who has a service-connected disability; or

3. the surviving spouse of a deceased eligible veteran.

(ii) An appointing authority shall apply a credit of two additional points on any selection test for a former prisoner of war.

(3) The following applicants are ineligible for a credit under this subsection:

(i) a current State employee; and

(ii) an eligible veteran who is convicted of a crime after being discharged from or completing military service.

(d) (1) (i) In this subsection the following words have the meanings indicated.

(ii) “Adjacent county” means any county adjacent to a host county.

(iii) “Host county” means any county in which a qualified prison facility is located.

(iv) “Qualified prison facility” means any new State correctional institution of 750 beds or more constructed for the Division of Correction of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services on or after January 1, 1985.

(2) In the selection process for an initial appointment to any position in a qualified prison facility, an appointing authority shall allow five points to each resident of the host county or an adjacent county if, in the most recent 12-month period for which data is available as reported by the Maryland Department of Labor, that county had an average unemployment rate that is more than 1.5 times the State unemployment rate as a whole.

(e) (1) (i) In this subsection the following words have the meanings indicated.

(ii) “Adjacent district” means a legislative district within Baltimore City adjacent to the host district or, if the adjacent district extends beyond Baltimore City, that part of the district within Baltimore City.

(iii) “Host district” means the legislative district in which the Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center is located.

(2) In the selection process for an initial appointment to any position at the Baltimore Juvenile Justice Center, an appointing authority shall allow five points to each resident of the host district or an adjacent district if, in the most recent 12-month period for which data is available as reported by the Maryland Department of Labor, Baltimore City had an average unemployment rate that is more than 1.5 times the State unemployment rate as a whole.

(f) In the selection process for an appointment to a position within the State Personnel Management System, an appointing authority shall allow five points to each resident of the State of Maryland.

(g) An appointing authority shall apply a credit of five points on a selection test for an individual with a disability, as defined by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

§7-208.

(a) The appointing authority shall:

(1) based on appropriate standards, place the candidates within the following categories:

(i) best qualified;

(ii) better qualified;

(iii) qualified;

(iv) unsatisfactory;

(v) certified by the Division of Rehabilitation Services;

(vi) eligible for reinstatement after layoff or after a separation under § 11-302 of this article;

(vii) eligible for reinstatement; or

(viii) eligible for transfer; and

(2) place the candidates on a list of eligible candidates by category in random order within the category except for candidates eligible for reinstatement after layoff or separation under § 11-302 of this article who shall be placed in that category in seniority point order.

(b) On request, an appointing authority shall notify eligible candidates of their relative standing on the list of eligible candidates.

(c) (1) The appointing authority shall file the list of eligible candidates with the Department for use by other agencies requesting it; or

(2) if the Department develops a list of eligible candidates, the Department shall send the list to the appropriate appointing authorities, on request, in accordance with regulations adopted by the Secretary.

§7-209.

(a) Except as otherwise provided by law, an appointing authority shall make an appointment from among the candidates in a rating category on a list of eligible candidates as follows:

(1) if there are at least five candidates rated best qualified, from that rating category;



(2) if there are fewer than five candidates rated best qualified, from the candidates in the best qualified and better qualified categories; and

(3) if there are fewer than five candidates rated best qualified and better qualified, from candidates in best qualified, better qualified, and qualified categories.

(b) A candidate who is an eligible veteran under § 7-207(c) of this subtitle shall be identified as an eligible veteran on the list of eligible candidates.

(c) (1) In making a selection, the appointing authority may interview any of the candidates in the rating category from which the selection will be made.

(2) When interviews are conducted under this section, the appointing authority must interview at least three candidates.

(d) The appointing authority must certify to the Secretary that the hiring process was conducted in accordance with the selection plan and this subtitle.