

LePage signs bill designed to improve veterans services

BY SCOTT THISTLE
SUN JOURNAL

AUGUSTA — Gov. Paul LePage on Thursday signed into law a bill that's meant to strengthen and modernize Maine's Bureau of Veterans Services as well as provide state community college and university tuition to members of the state's National Guard.

The legislation, largely based on recommendations from a special commission created by the Legislature in 2015, was later amended to provide tuition waivers for Guard members who are in good standing with their units.

Rep. Jared Golden, D-Lewiston, sponsor of the 2015 law that set up the special commission, along with Rep. Brad Farrin, R-Norridgewock, who sponsored the tuition waiver legislation, worked together to garner broad bipartisan support for the bill signed by LePage.

LePage vetoed legislation that set up the commission, but the Legislature overrode the veto in 2015.

"Today is a great day for

the Mainers who serve our country," Golden said after the bill was signed. "So many people came together to make sure we ease the transition from military to civilian life. We now have a law that helps us do that better and truly honors the contributions of Maine servicemen and servicewomen."

Farrin, a 30-year member of the Air National Guard and an Air Force veteran, said the new law puts Maine on the same playing field as other states in the region.

"Maine was the only state in New England that did not offer any type of tuition assistance to our Guard members," Farrin said. "Today, thanks to a true bipartisan effort, we offer one of the best educational incentives."

Among other things, the legislation provides about \$2 million a year to add staff, specifically three new veterans service officers, to the bureau so it can better connect with and assist Maine's estimated 140,000 veterans as they seek the services and benefits they are entitled to under state and federal laws.

Brig. Gen. Douglas Farn-



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Jared Golden (left), D-Lewiston, and Brad Farrin, R-Norridgewock, stand in the State House Hall of Flags on Thursday after a brief bill-signing ceremony with Gov. Paul LePage. LePage sign into law a bill ushered through the Legislature by Golden and Farrin that bolsters the state's Bureau of Veterans Services and provides state community college and university tuition to members of the state's National Guard.

ham, Maine's director of the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Services and the state's National Guard adjutant general, along with several members of the National Guard, attended the ceremony with LePage. Other Maine veterans who served on the special commission also attended the ceremony.

"This is a tremendous day for the Maine National Guard," Farnham said. "The tuition bill will go a long way toward recruiting and retaining our Maine National Guard force and keep our talented men and women here in Maine where they belong. We are also grateful for the additional resources that will allow the Bureau of

Veterans Services to better serve all Maine veterans."

Golden, a Marine Corps veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, pushed for review of the bureau after a series of meetings he and other members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee had with veterans across Maine.

From those meetings, Golden said, it became clear that the state's most recent and youngest veterans felt disconnected from the bureau and many had little information about services available to them to help with everything from higher education and employment training to health services offered through the federal Veterans Administration.

Of the four new positions the legislation brings to the bureau, one will be dedicated to improving and coordinating outreach and communication with Maine veterans.

The bureau estimates it has contact with only about 65,000 of the state's total veteran population, one of the highest per capita in the U.S.

The other three new staff will be added to the bureau's existing veterans service officers, who work directly with veterans to help them identify and receive the benefits they earned through their military service. One of those new veterans service officers also will be tasked to focus on Maine's homeless veterans population. A key finding of the commission's work was the lack of a dedicated state agency or individual that focuses on the issue of homeless veterans.

The other two new veterans service officers will be mobile and able to go to veterans where they are in order to help them.

The new law also provides funding to modernize the bureau's antiquated paper-only records system with a computer-based system that will allow the bureau to better share information on the veterans it serves.

"I am proud to sign this bill into law," LePage said in a prepared statement after the signing ceremony, which was closed to the media and the public.

State's use of temporary help on the rise

BY SOPHIE QUINTON
STATELINE.ORG

WASHINGTON — Steve Howard, the head of Vermont's state employees union, says that temporary jobs are among the fastest-growing in state government. But Vermont's Human Resources Department wasn't sure.

Many states don't publish records of their short-term and contract hires. Even states that do, like Vermont, have to do a little research to determine how that share of the state workforce may be changing over time and why. "We probably have that data," said Thomas Cheney, deputy commissioner for the Vermont Department of Human Resources on investigating Howard's claim. He can say that when the state has experienced increases in temporary staffing in recent years, it's been because of an emergency, such as Tropical Storm Irene.

A small but growing body of research suggests that work arrangements other than full-time jobs are more common across the economy, including in government. It's hard to tell, however, how much states contribute to the so-called 1099 economy through their hiring and contracting.

States have long hired short-term workers for seasonal jobs, to fill emergency vacancies, or to serve as outside advisers. Such arrangements allow agencies to staff up during busy periods and give workers more flexibility.

But temporary jobs also can leave workers without benefits such as unemployment or health insurance. And agencies may end up spending more money on outside help than they would if they brought people on full-time. There's no way for states to weigh costs and benefits if they don't track their employees.

A few states, such as Hawaii and Vermont, are taking a closer look at their short-term positions to make sure they're being used appropriately. Georgia's one state that has been prompted by federal health care reform to keep a closer eye on short-term jobs.

"I think at just a strategic level, it makes business sense to really understand what it takes for us to deliver services to the state of Georgia," said Candy Sarvis, the deputy commissioner of

States have long hired short-term workers for seasonal jobs, to fill emergency vacancies, but temporary jobs can leave workers without benefits such as unemployment or insurance

human resources administration for the Georgia Department of Administrative Services.

Positions that are neither permanent nor full-time could employ as many as 40 percent of Americans, according to a 2015 study from the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

Lawrence Katz of Harvard University and Alan Krueger of Princeton University published survey data last month that showed more people are working as freelancers, on an on-call basis, for temporary help agencies or for contract firms across all industries and occupations. In 2005, about 10 percent of jobs fit those definitions. Last year, 16 percent did.

The increase was so significant that it might account for all the job growth over the past decade, the economists said.

Public administration experienced a jump from about 2 percent of workers in temporary arrangements to 10 percent, they found. In education and health service, which include many public sector jobs, 16 percent of jobs now fit their definition of alternative work arrangements.

Across all industries, the arrangement that increased the most was workers hired through contract firms.

It's hard to tell if — or how — state workforces have been shaped by the trend. Many states only keep close track of their core civil servants, who are still overwhelmingly full-time, permanent employees. State agencies track their spending on contracts, not the number of jobs those contracts create.

Colorado, for example, defines as state workers those employees of the executive, judicial and legislative branches, as well as most employees in higher education. But the state's Human Resources Division only oversees full-time and part-time workers in executive branch agencies. So those workers, who comprise a third of the state's workforce, are the ones included in annual workforce reports.

The state's human resources team doesn't track how many people are employed through personal services contracts, said Michaela Turner, the communications manager who puts the reports together.

A public records request revealed that state agencies, the governor's office and the judicial branch employed about 4,000 temporary workers last year, 100 fewer people than two years before.

Federal health care reform has pushed states to keep better data. Georgia started including nonpermanent employees in its workforce reports in 2013, and started tracking the share of employees that qualified for health insurance in 2014. The Affordable Care Act requires large employers to provide health insurance to workers who log at least 30 hours a week.

"I wanted to get a better handle on how many people were actually working for the state," Sarvis said.

Eighty percent of the state's 71,000 employees worked full time and were eligible for benefits in 2015, a slight decrease from the year before. Sixteen percent were considered short-term hires, not including independent contractors and people employed by temporary staffing firms.

Sarvis' office is planning to more closely manage temporary staffing, too, because the state may have to offer those employees health insurance under some circumstances. "The IRS may consider them our employees instead of the temp staffing agency's employees," she said.

Most Georgia agencies employ a small number of short-term workers, usually 6 percent of their employees. The state's technical colleges are an outlier: about 56 percent of their 13,000 jobs are short-term, including 4,000 adjunct faculty positions.

That's typical. About half of college faculty nationally now work on a part-time basis.

Nonstandard jobs give state agencies hiring flexibility, but positions that fly under the radar can be easily abused.

In 2013, a Massachusetts investigation found some state agencies had held on to temporary workers for years — including, in one case, a temporary employee who worked in accounting for the State Police for over a decade.

Outside workers can also cost taxpayers. Nonpartisan evaluators for the North Carolina Legislature found last year that state agencies were hiring consultants and contractors improperly and paying some of them more than what the state's top executives earn.

In Vermont, one challenge is that the Legislature sets the total number of state jobs. When state agencies need more workers than they've been allocated, they may hire temps instead. There are about 2,000 temporary workers in the state, and Howard says some departments rely too heavily on them.

In its 2014 budget, the Legislature approved a pilot program that allows some agencies to use their existing funding to add full-time positions.

About 175 positions have been created to date, Cheney said. In some cases, state agencies have converted temporary and contract positions to full-time positions. Cheney's office hasn't calculated whether the changes have saved or cost the state money.

"What the position pilot allows us to do is to refocus on ensuring that our programs are achieving the goals that we set out for them, and they're operating within their means," Cheney said. The Legislature is considering extending the pilot.

In Hawaii, a House bill would limit temporary workers to serving two 89-day terms, with certain exceptions. Converting the state's 300 temporary employees to full-time workers would add \$3 million to \$4 million a year to the state pension fund, according to the Department of Budget and Finance.

State agencies say that, for various reasons, some jobs are impossible to fill with full-time workers. Georgia's Sarvis said many workers don't want 9-to-5 jobs anymore. "We've got several examples in Georgia where we've offered full-time positions to individuals and they've said 'no, thank you,'" she said.

Many doctors still don't talk to older patients about death

REUTERS

Even though primary care doctors know it's good for older patients to consider life expectancy in making treatment decisions, many physicians still avoid this discussion, a small study suggests.

When researchers talked about life expectancy with 28 primary care providers, the clinicians described several barriers that keep them from talking about long-term prognosis with their patients including time constraints as well as a lack of confidence in tools commonly used to predict how many years patients have left.

"Discussing life expectancy can be difficult or uncomfortable," said lead study author Dr. Nancy Schoenborn, a geriatric health researcher at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore.

Older adults of similar age can have very different life expectancies that influence whether they might live long enough to benefit from treating illnesses or taking medicine to prevent disease, Schoenborn and colleagues note in JAMA Internal Medicine.

Almost half of elderly people don't have an accurate sense of how much longer they're likely to live previous research has found. This may lead some of them to make poorly informed medical decisions.

An accurate sense of life expectancy might, however, lead a cancer patient to skip the toxic chemotherapy if they're not likely to live long enough to benefit from it, or it might encourage someone with diabetes to make lifestyle changes that could improve the last few decades of life.

To get a sense of how primary care providers think about incorporating life expectancy into medical decisions, Schoenborn and colleagues interviewed 26 physicians and two nurse practitioners in a large group practice with multiple sites in rural, suburban and urban settings.

Twenty of these practitioners said at least 25 percent of their patients were older adults.

These primary care practitioners reported considering life expectancy, often in the range of five to 10 years, in several clinical scenarios in their care of older patients, but said that they balanced prognosis against various other factors in decision making.

In particular, they were more reluctant to stop preventive care in younger patients with a limited life expectancy, even when these interventions could take many more years to prove beneficial than patients would likely be alive. They did, however, tend to think more about long-term prognosis in planning preventive care for things such as cancer screening or diabetes management.

By the time patients reached their 80s and 90s, however, the clinicians said they tended to focus more consistently on addressing advanced directives and goals of care with patients who had a poor long-term prognosis.

The study is small, and it's possible that the views of clinicians in the practice studied might not mirror what happens in other primary care settings.

To the extent clinicians fail to discuss life expectancy due to a lack of confidence in being able to predict long-term prognosis, there are many calculators available online that can help, noted Dr. Alexander Smith of the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), co-author of an editorial accompanying the study.

One such calculator is ePrognosis from UCSF.

There are two problems with not accounting for prognosis, Smith said by email.

"Some older adults with a long prognosis are likely to benefit from tests and treatments that take years to take effect, and if the clinician relies solely on age-based cutoffs these older adults might miss out on beneficial treatments," Smith said.

Summit Project Memorial March to be held Saturday

NEWPORT — The Summit Project Memorial March to honor and remember fallen veterans is a living memorial that will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, April 16, at the American Legion Post 105, 64 North St.

People may participate as spectators by lining up along the route with flags or by walking in the memorial march, which will begin at the Legion, proceed to Route 7 and down Main Street, ending at the new Veteran's Memorial site.

At the conclusion of the

march, a special Honor Case ceremony inside the Newport Cultural Center with Gold Star families, those carrying memorial stones and special guests.

The event was organized by the Town of Newport and the Newport Cultural Center. Learn more about the living memorial at TheSummitProject.org or find the project on Facebook.

For information, contact Debra Smith at debra0702Lynn@gmail.com or P.J. Laney at dplaney13@juno.com.

Brunswick Naval Air Station reunion planned

CBS 13

BRUNSWICK — A reunion of former military personnel and civilian workers at the Brunswick Naval Air Station is in the works.

The get-together, put together by members of the Brunswick Naval Air Station Reunion Committee, is being planned for this summer.

The plans include bowling Friday night, golf and dinner Saturday and a special chapel service Sunday.

It's a chance to share some special memories.

The reunion will take place the weekend of July 15, 16 and 17. Hundreds of people are expected to attend.

Woman's body pulled from river in Sanford

SANFORD — The body of a local woman was discovered in the Mousam River on Wednesday evening, according to a release from the Sanford Police Department, but foul play is not suspected.

A passer-by reported seeing a body in the river near a bridge on Emery Street at 5:54 p.m., police said. Paramedics determined at the scene that

the woman, 50-year-old Lorlie A. Payeur, was dead.

"Police officers and detectives from the Criminal Investigation Division responded and began an investigation," police said in the release.

The cause of death is still undetermined, and the case has been referred to the state medical examiner.