

ACE Newsletter

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The Impact of Wisconsin Civil Service “Reform”

In 2011, almost immediately following his election, Scott Walker included language in the budget repair bill (Act 10) that primarily affected the following areas: collective bargaining, compensation, retirement, health insurance, and sick leave of public sector employees.

In 2016, the Walker administration initiated and the legislature passed civil service “reform” through Act 150 which impacted portions of the state civil service laws for classified employees, including the hiring process, performance reviews, discipline and grievance procedures, and layoff and reinstatement procedures.

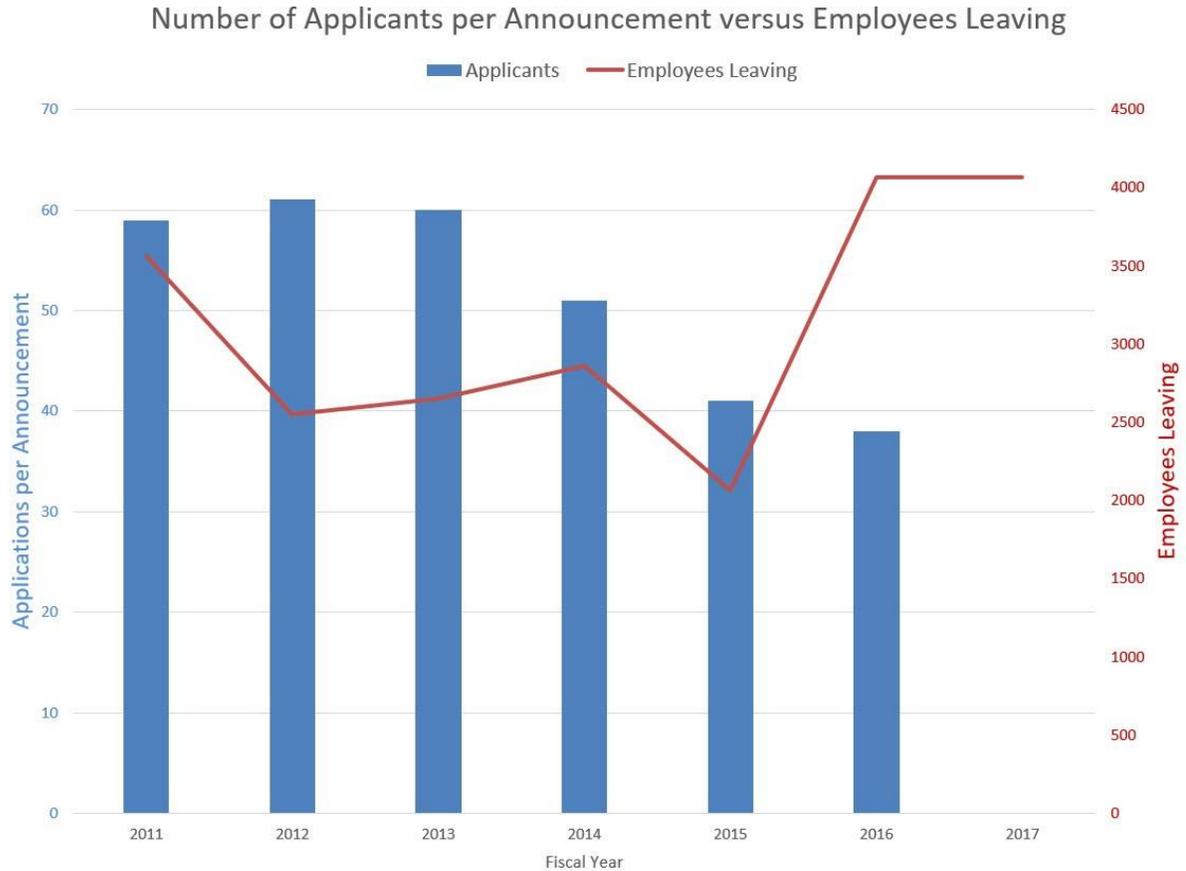
Administrative rules for carrying out the 2016 changes were completed in 2018 and shared with ACE members in a recent newsletter.

ACE was interested in studying the impact of these changes on the state employee work force and requested information under the open records laws from the Department of Administration last summer on the numbers of employees who had left state service for various reasons during several previous years. While this information should have been readily available via the payroll system, the Department chose to delay until shortly before the election to release the data to us.

ACE analysis of the data was completed by ACE Board member, Jack Lawton, and revealed several problematic trends related to the attrition of permanently appointed employees. As the following chart demonstrates, the number of employees leaving state service has continued to grow (with the exception of 2015) throughout the previous administration’s tenure. As you can see from the chart, the last two fiscal years show a remarkable increase in attrition (the red line), which includes all reasons for leaving state service. This trend is true for all of the major reasons that employees leave state employment, such as retirement, discipline and resignation.

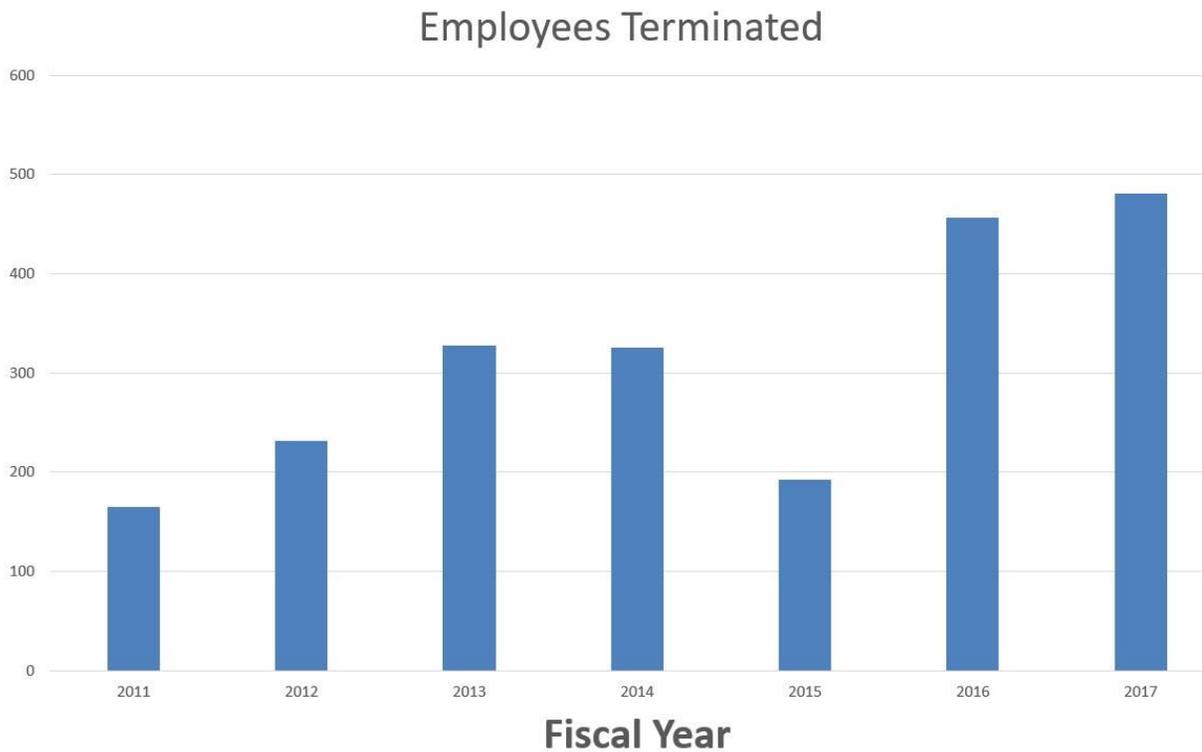
A further disturbing trend shown in this graph is the average number of applications per announcement that the state is attracting to fill vacancies which ACE extracted from the Classified Workforce and Affirmative Action Reports

published by the Division of Personnel Management for the various years (the “Applications per Announcement” data for 2017 were not available to us at this time). This same trend has been followed by the total number of applications received by the State according to the DPM reports.



The Board understands that the counts of employees leaving are somewhat soft in years 2016 and 2017 due to the implementation of the new payroll system but believe that the strong pattern is meaningful. These trends signify that the State employee workforce is faced with a shrinking pool of job applicants and a growing loss of existing employees. In combination, this will inevitably lead to a disastrous result unless strong efforts are made to retain existing employees, attract new ones and generally make plans for the future workforce.

The following graph shows an especially alarming trend. It appears that the numbers of employees terminated over the fiscal years 2011 – 2017 have generally been increasing during the last administration with a remarkable spike starting in 2016. Clearly, something is going on here that needs explanation. A possible theory is that a sizable portion of the inflated terminations can be attributed to an expanding set of unqualified hires failing to pass probation due to the relaxed civil service hiring procedures.



ACE shared this information with Governor Tony Evers in a letter February 4, 2019. ACE plans to make further recommendations to the Governor on potential administrative rule and legislative changes that could be made to offset some of these trends. However, it is likely that changes in the legislature would need to take place in order to pass new legislation or administrative rules.