

Press Release
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Wisconsin Coalition to Save Civil Service Celebrates the Anniversary of the Wisconsin Civil Service System

June 17, 2020, is the 115th anniversary of the Wisconsin Civil Service system.

Civil service is a system, created in Wisconsin Statute, with procedures for the hiring, promotion, discipline and termination of state employees based on an objective assessment of their qualifications and clear, standardized criteria.

Civil service is recognized as promoting clean government and preventing partisan influence, cronyism, patronage, nepotism and corruption in public agencies. Under the civil service system, government should serve the citizens of the state – not just corporate or political interests. The original slogan of Wisconsin's civil service was: “The Best Shall Serve the State.”

“Because Wisconsin Civil Service helps ensure that public services are delivered with professionalism, efficiency, and integrity by highly qualified workers, it is the people of Wisconsin who are the prime beneficiaries of the civil service system,” said Sally Drew of the Association of Career Employees.

“Civil service is a key tool for democracy and roots out political and unfair influence from our public institutions,” said Harry Richardson, a member of the AFSCME Local 171 Executive Committee.

Merit-based civil service promotes fair and transparent employment practices that combat discrimination based on race, gender and other personal characteristics that are irrelevant to serving the public. Historically, this is one reason that state and local public sectors have provided more equitable opportunities for women and people of color than other employment settings.

Wisconsin Civil Service has been eroded under several recent administrations. In particular, Wisconsin's Act 150 – put into effect on July 1, 2016 – made historic reductions in the Wisconsin Civil Service system, including eliminating the requirement for civil service exams in state hiring and changing the concept of just cause. Since 2016, there has been a spike in employees leaving state service.

“Our goal is the full restoration of the Wisconsin Civil Service system, and a recommitment to public agencies oriented to solving people's problems and serving the public good. Wisconsin should lead on reform efforts as it did when Governor Robert M La Follette signed one of the nation's first state civil service bills into law in 1905,” said Bill Franks, Chair of the Labor & Industry Committee of the NAACP of Dane County Branch 36AB, member of Protect Our Wisconsin Retirement Security (POWRS), and Chief Steward Emeritus of American Federation of Teachers Local 4848, Wisconsin Professional Employee Council.

The Coalition to Save Civil Service includes the South Central Federation of Labor, AFSCME Council 32, American Federation of Teachers-Wisconsin (AFT-W), the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, the Association of Career Employees (ACE), Our Wisconsin Revolution, AFT-W State Employee Council, Wisconsin Professional Employee Association, POWRS, NAACP-Dane County, Progressive Dane, AFSCME Locals 171 and 1, AFSCME Retirees Subchapter 52, and Wisconsin Science Professionals.