SENATE, No. 2010

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 5, 2020

Sponsored by:
Senator JOSEPH A. LAGANA
District 38 (Bergen and Passaic)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes State to oversee application for and receipt of federal funds Ombudsman by State agencies.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

AN ACT establishing the State Ombudsman for Federal Funds and supplementing Title 52 of the Revised Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. a. There is created the Office of the Ombudsman for Federal Funds within the Department of the Treasury. The purpose of the office and the duties of the ombudsman shall be to serve as a resource to enable State agencies to qualify for, apply for, and receive federal funds, and to oversee the activities of State agencies in this regard.

The ombudsman shall be appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate and shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor during the Governor's term of office. Any vacancy occurring in the position of ombudsman shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment. If the ombudsman shall be unable for any reason to serve the full term of office, the Governor shall designate an acting ombudsman until a successor is appointed and has qualified.

The ombudsman shall be qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of the office. The ombudsman shall be a person of recognized judgment, integrity, and objectivity.

The ombudsman shall devote his entire time to the duties of the office.

b. The ombudsman shall organize, administer, and direct the work of the office, including the work of such professional and clerical staff as may be necessary to carry out the duties. The ombudsman shall be entitled to call upon and receive the services of any full-time or part-time employee of any State department, agency, board, bureau, or commission, as may be available to carry out the duties. When existing State employees are not available, the ombudsman shall hire such persons as deemed necessary and appropriate, subject to Title 11A (Civil Service) of the New Jersey Statutes and within the limits of funds made available to the office. The ombudsman shall appoint and employ such officers, investigators, experts, consultants, or other professionally qualified personnel on a contract basis or otherwise as deemed necessary and appropriate, in accordance with any applicable law, regulation, or executive order, for the purpose of providing such professional advice as the ombudsman may from time to time require, within the limits of the funds made available therefor.

The ombudsman shall coordinate with State agencies and implement a strategy for those State agencies to ensure that they qualify and apply for and receive available federal funds in a timely manner.

It shall be the duty of the ombudsman to:

serve as a source of information for federal funds available to the State under federal laws and regulations;

provide information and support to State agencies in navigating and understanding the process for obtaining federal funds;

review the processes of State agencies regarding the application for federal funds and make recommendations;

identify the areas within State agencies that need to be strengthened to qualify for federal funds;

evaluate, report on, and recommend strategies and best practices to improve the ability of State agencies to qualify for and receive federal funds;

establish procedures to monitor the application for and receipt of all federal funds to State agencies;

promote and facilitate a coordinated approach for applications by State agencies for federal funds;

promote State agencies to provide an opportunity for their qualification for and receipt of federal funds;

develop productive relationships with the various State and federal agencies to promote the success of State agencies in receiving federal funds;

act as the contact person for State and federal agencies to support and advocate on behalf of State agencies in qualifying and applying for federal funds;

make information available to State and federal agencies to improve access to federal funds by State agencies;

create and maintain an electronic system to track all federal funding opportunities as they become available;

collaborate with the federal and State agencies to develop a centralized database of available federal funds;

respond to inquiries from State and federal agencies regarding all aspects of an application for and receipt of federal funds by the State;

publish and disseminate information on the availability and receipt of federal funds;

investigate whether applications for federal funds were submitted appropriately and in accordance with relevant deadlines, laws, rules and regulations and policies;

make necessary inquiries and obtain such information as deemed necessary;

inspect any documents, forms, books, or records which are relevant to an application and receipt of federal funds;

report to the Governor, the State Treasurer, and the Presiding Officers of the Legislature any failure by a State agency to apply for or receive in a timely manner any available federal funds; and

perform such other functions as the Governor or State Treasurer shall direct or as the ombudsman may deem appropriate regarding applications for and receipt of federal funds by the State.

c. The ombudsman shall establish a website describing the functions of the office and ombudsman, and providing the mailing address and the e-mail address of the office and ombudsman and a toll-free information telephone number.

The ombudsman may publicize the existence, function, and activities of the office to the public at large.

d. The ombudsman shall report to the Governor, and pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1) to the Legislature, on or before January 31 of each year, summarizing the activities of the office for the preceding year; documenting any significant problems with regard to qualifying for, applying for, and receiving federal funds or the applications therefor by State agencies; and setting forth any recommendations for statutory or regulatory change which will further the ability of the State to qualify for, apply for, and receive federal funds.

2. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill establishes the Office of the Ombudsman for Federal Funds within the Department of the Treasury. The purpose of the office and the duties of the ombudsman will be to serve as a resource to enable State agencies to qualify and apply for and receive federal funds, and to oversee the activities of State agencies in this regard.

The ombudsman would be appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate to serve at the pleasure of the Governor during the Governor's term of office.

The ombudsman must be qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of the office, and be a person of recognized judgment, integrity, and objectivity.

The bill specifies at length the duties of the ombudsman, and requires annual reports to the Governor and the Legislature on the activities of the ombudsman.