

Committee on Commerce and Tourism

CS/CS/HB 1463 — Department of Economic Opportunity

by Commerce Committee; Tourism, Infrastructure and Energy Subcommittee; and Rep. LaMarca (CS/CS/SB 1948 by Appropriations Committee; Commerce and Tourism Committee; and Senators Bean, Bradley, Pizzo, and Bracy)

DEO Secretary

The bill changes the title for the head of the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) from “Executive Director” to “Secretary of Economic Opportunity,” and creates the Office of Economic Accountability and Transparency in the DEO. It adds the secretary or his or her designee to the Enterprise Florida, Inc., board of directors and the CareerSource Florida, Inc., board of directors, and allows the secretary to create offices and appoint division directors.

Community Development Block Grants

The bill expands the grant categories that applicants may compete for funding under the Florida Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, increases the percentage of CDBG funds that the DEO may set aside annually for use in local government jurisdictions for which an emergency or natural disaster has been declared, and removes distribution limitations. The bill repeals a provision that limits the number of grant applications a local government may submit during each CDBG cycle, as well as a provision that requires unused economic development grant funds to be awarded on a first come, first serve basis. The DEO is authorized to prohibit an applicant from receiving a grant or to penalize an applicant in the rating of a current application under certain circumstances. The bill also requires local governments to expedite the approval of building permits applied for by contractors on behalf of a property owner participating in the CDBG-Disaster Recovery program.

Workforce and Reemployment

The bill provides that the DEO, for Fiscal Year 2021-2022, must take actions to modernize the reemployment assistance information system to support the efficient distribution of benefits and the effective operation and management of the reemployment assistance program as provided in the General Appropriations Act.

The bill will allow regional workforce boards to conduct level 2 background screenings, and expands the definition of “temporary layoff” to include an employer initiated furlough. The requirement that a reemployment assistance claimant must provide the telephone number of each prospective employer contacted for each week of unemployment claimed is repealed, and “address” means a website address, a physical address, or an e-mail address for purposes of reporting the address of each prospective employer contacted. A provision that provides that a domestic violence claimant is ineligible for reemployment assistance benefits if the claimant refuses an employer’s reasonable accommodation is removed, and employers are required to respond to a notice of claim within 14 days, instead of 20 days. The bill also imposes a 5-year statute of limitations on reemployment assistance appeals, and removes the requirement that reemployment assistance appeals referees must be Florida attorneys. Additionally, a process to allow for employer-assisted reemployment assistance claims is created to provide a way for

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employers to notify the DEO of a mass separation (1,000 or more employees) and to make a group filing on behalf of the employer's similarly situated employees.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming a law.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 118-0