Utah Public Employees Association

Understand the issues

Utah's career service "merit" system

The Issue

Whether Utah should maintain its more than 50-year-old Career Service System, which protects the jobs of nearly two-thirds of state "merit" employees by guaranteeing rights that include:

- Recruiting and hiring based on ability, knowledge, and skills, and without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, political affiliation, age, or disability
- Equitable and competitive compensation
- Adequate training
- Retention based on performance
- Access to a fair, expeditious, and inexpensive grievance process

Why It Matters

The Utah Public Employees Association considers Utah's Career Service System established in 1965 one of its most important accomplishments on behalf of public employees. Dismantling or altering the system would change state workers' employment status to "at-will," meaning they could be dismissed at any time without warning as long as their firing did not violate state or federal law.

Merit-based employment is vital to most categories of state workers because it prevents a "spoils system" under which politicians award government jobs as political favors and fire employees as political retribution. Utah's Career Service System, outlined in the Utah Personnel Management Act (67-19-3.1), ensures a stable, high-quality workforce that operates equitably and free of political coercion

UPEA's Position

UPEA opposes efforts to dismantle or circumvent provisions of Utah's Career Service System, believing state government functions best when administered by qualified, well-trained employees who are fairly compensated and free to do their jobs without fear.

admin@upea.net
1000 W Bellwood Ln., SLC
upea.net
(801) 264-8732

Utah Public Employees Association

The Association favors supervisor training and proper use of performance management tools to address employee performance problems and satisfy critics who argue that Utah's Career Service System restricts hiring and enables poor performers to keep their jobs.

UPEA in Action

When Utah legislators and other leaders attempt to alter Utah's Career Service System, UPEA acts swiftly to lobby on behalf of state employees. UPEA's efforts in recent years to protect state employees' merit-based status include:

- After Utah Department of Human Services representatives visited Georgia in 2007 to explore the elimination of its employee merit system, UPEA met internally and with key Utah lawmakers to develop a plan to retain Utah's Career Service System. Utah has made no changes based on Georgia's approach.
- UPEA in 2010 urged Utah lawmakers to adopt a legislative audit's recommendation to require more performance training and accountability of state supervisors. Legislators could have elected to pursue changes to the Career Service System as an alternative, including requiring all new state workers to be hired as at-will employees.
- UPEA's opposition in 2011 to Senate Bill 120, which encouraged some Utah Department of Workforce Services employees to surrender their merit status in favor of a bonus program, contributed to the program's eventual abandonment.
- In 2012 and again in 2016, UPEA lobbying and education efforts helped stall attempts to limit employee merit status by the Salt Lake County District Attorney and the Utah State Board of Education.

Despite UPEA's success in advocating to maintain the Career Service System, merit-based employment for state workers remains under attack. Arizona and Colorado have started to phase out some aspects of their merit systems, and, like many other states, Utah will remain under pressure to eliminate state employee protections.

Understand the issue, and help UPEA advocate for state employee rights. For more information or to join now, call (801) 264-8732.

admin@upea.net
141 E 5600 S #120, Murray
upea.net
(801) 264-8732