

Week of February 1, 2010



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[Streamlining Job Services for Missourians](#)

Most of us can agree that a critical step to Missouri's economic recovery involves increasing the availability of well-paying jobs. Another important—but often overlooked—component of economic recovery is making sure that we have skilled workers ready and able to fill those jobs. This is why it is crucial for lawmakers to pass legislation this session that not only creates a favorable environment for businesses to grow and thrive, but also ensures that Missouri has employees who can prosper in their fields of expertise.

This session I am sponsoring [Senate Bill 673](#), which would put the functions of unemployment services, job training, job placement and workforce development under one roof in order to streamline any job-related assistance offered to Missourians. Specifically, the bill would create the Office of Job Development and Training. The office would take care of any matter relating to the administration of free public employment offices, employment assistance programs, and job development training and placement that is currently handled by the Division of Workforce Development within the Department of Economic Development. By streamlining job and unemployment services, we can better serve Missourians who are going through a tough time.

Currently, unemployment services are managed by the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations while job services are offered through the Missouri Department of Economic Development. While our departments do a good job in their areas, sometimes they fail to communicate with each other. With unemployment and job training and placement going hand in hand, it just makes sense to put it all together so we can make state government work as efficiently and effectively as possible. This bill would make job services more efficient with no cost to taxpayers.

Another part of SB 673 addresses unemployment benefits. It was brought to my attention about a year ago that some people in our community had to travel almost 50 miles to report that they were unemployed, and on subsequent visits, drive that same long distance just to say they were looking for work. People who are unemployed need help and access to job training. Many are without transportation, so the fact that they have to drive 50 miles just to report their employment status is something I believe we can do better. While unemployment benefits are designed as a temporary “life-line” to help people get back on their feet, we should try to make the transition between jobs as smooth as possible.

To help solve this problem, my bill changes some of the requirements for collecting unemployment benefits while implementing conditions to protect our businesses. Currently, in order to qualify for unemployment benefits, claimants must report in person every four weeks. Under SB 673, they would be able to report by phone or e-mail and the four-week reporting requirement would be waived when the state unemployment rate is 6 percent or higher. The unemployment rate for December 2009 was 9.6 percent and 71,254 initial unemployment insurance claims (including extended benefits) were filed. Clearly, many Missourians are struggling. During what is a very difficult time in their lives, we should be accommodating and take advantage of the technology available to limit the need for expensive and time-intensive physical trips to the unemployment office.

Senate Bill 673 was heard in the Financial and Governmental Organizations and Elections Committee this week. To watch video or listen to audio of me introducing the bill in committee, go to <http://www.senate.mo.gov/multimedia/Pearce/Multimedia-2009.html>.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

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