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**Evers seeking 55 state positions to expand debt collection, enforce alcohol laws**

Less than three months after signing a budget that added 517 state positions, Gov. Tony Evers is seeking permission from the Joint Finance Committee to add 55 more full-time equivalents.

The requests from six agencies would add new employees to expand debt collection efforts in Wisconsin, help consumers navigate Obamacare and address the expanded workload to enforce alcohol laws.

Of the new request, almost half were already proposed in the budget only to see the Republican-led Joint Finance Committee reject them.

Spokesmen for JFC Co-chairs Alberta Darling, R-River Hills, and John Nygren, R-Marinette, said in late September that they were considering the requests. Nygren’s office noted that a number of factors will influence the committee’s review. That includes, for example, the 211 vacancies at the agencies to see if they could fill the jobs that way. Nygren’s office said 40 of those have been vacant for more than six months.

Committee members have until Oct. 11 to raise an objection to the requests, which would trigger a meeting by the full JFC.

Altogether, the six agencies are seeking $4.1 million in program revenue to cover the costs of the positions in 2019-20 with that climbing to $5.2 million the following fiscal year. None of the positions would rely on general-purpose revenue for funding.

The largest request is from the Department of Safety and Professional Services, which is seeking 20 positions with $1.4 million in costs in the first year. The agency budget asked lawmakers to approve 20 positions to investigate violations and speed up the time for processing license applications. The Legislature ultimately approved six, and now the agency is back seeking 20 more.

The other agency requests include:

* Two from the Department of Revenue. One would add 15 positions to expand the state’s debt collection program, while the other would add four to help enforce alcohol laws.
* The Department of Financial Institutions seeking nine positions to review banks, mortgage providers, credit unions and securities.
* The Insurance Commissioner seeking five positions to help consumers enroll in health insurance coverage through the Affordable Care Act. The governor sought 5.1 full-time equivalents in the budget, but JFC removed them from the document. The agency is also asking JFC to release $541,300 in each year of the biennium to expand existing outreach and education activities, especially in rural parts of the state.
* DATCP seeking permission for one position to help carry out the state’s industrial hemp program. The recently signed budget added three positions in the budget to help with the program and reallocated 1.6 full-time equivalents.
* The Public Service Commission asking for one new position to support the enhanced Broadband Expansion Grant program. Evers included the position in his budget, but the JFC removed it.

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