

Dept. of Workforce Development: Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council holds public hearing

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MADISON - The Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council (UIAC) held two public hearings Thursday and officially launched the biennial cycle for what is commonly referred to as the “agreed bill” for unemployment insurance law (UI) changes.

Ideas from the hearing, or received in writing, will be discussed by the Council at the next meeting, Jan. 19, 2023.

“Comments from the public help drive the agenda of the UIAC, and with the public hearing now complete, members of the council will now begin to form their proposals for the next agreed bill cycle,” DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek said. “I want to thank the members of the public that provided comment, and the members of the council who play a vital role in advising the Department of Workforce Development and the Legislature on UI law and policy.”

The “agreed bill” process begins with the Council holding a public hearing. Testimony regarding amendments to the current statutes is taken from all interested sources, including representatives of labor, management, legal, and other interested parties. Testimony is summarized and presented to the Council in the form of specific amendments. The Council’s labor and management members negotiate the final amendment proposals. The proposals must gain unanimous consent from the Council to be passed into the “agreed upon” bill process. Agreed bills still require approval from the Legislature and Governor to become law.

During the last cycle of public hearings, held in November 2020, changes to Work-Share were proposed and ultimately signed into law in the Agreed Bill on April 8,

2022. The law change made the temporary pandemic-era changes to Work-Share permanent. Generally, the changes increased flexibility for employers and lowered the requirements for employers to participate, which permitted more small businesses to participate in work share. Work-Share is a program designed to help employers retain employees during slow business periods by reducing employees' hours and allowing affected employees to file for partial Unemployment Insurance benefits to replace a portion of their pay.

About the Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council

The Secretary of the Department of Workforce Development appoints council members to six-year terms. The Council is composed of five management members representing the interests of employers and five labor members representing the interests of employees.

One management representative is required by state law to be an owner of a small business or represent an association that is primarily composed of small businesses. In addition to these voting members, a permanent classified employee of the department serves as the nonvoting chairperson for the Council.

The Council studies potential law changes on an ongoing basis, providing a balanced forum where the interests of both employees and employers are considered.

The Legislature created the Council in 1932 to advise the Department of Workforce Development and the Legislature on policy matters concerning the development and administration of UI law.

For over 90 years, the Council has acted as a catalyst for labor and management representatives to work together to ensure stability in the UI system and collaborate on positive changes to enhance the program.