

Rep. Kitchens: Calls on Governor to fix licensing issue

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MADISON, Wis. – State Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) is disheartened that he continues to hear from residents who are experiencing issues with obtaining their occupational licenses from the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services.

“Since the beginning of this year, my office has been receiving more and more complaints from people who want to work in our area but cannot do so because they are still waiting on DSPS to grant them their licenses,” Rep. Kitchens said. “Some have been going through unnecessary delays for months without even getting a return call from the state agency. This has resulted in many prospective employees losing thousands of dollars of income. This is simply not acceptable, especially during a time when the state is facing a significant worker shortage and inflation is causing many families to struggle financially.”

During the 2021-23 budget cycle, the Legislature earmarked \$5 million for DSPS’s online licensing system under the condition the agency submitted a plan to the Joint Committee on Finance before the funds were released. It took DSPS almost a year to come up with that plan.

In the last two bienniums, the Legislature also has increased DSPS’s budget by 7.3 percent and 3.7 percent, respectively, while adding 11 new job positions and nearly \$5.7 million for IT projects. Furthermore, Gov. Evers directed an additional \$10 million in federal funding to DSPS for the purpose of hiring more staff and completing technology upgrades.

However, DSPS continues to have difficulties in retaining staff. In the past year, its number of job vacancies has increased from seven to 29. There is no indication that

DSPS views this as a wage issue since the state agency did not seek a pay increase for these particular workers in their latest compensation plan submitted to the Joint Committee on Employment Relations.

“If DSPS needs more help in its licensing division, it could rearrange staff within the department or create Limited Term Employment positions to meet the demands,” Rep. Kitchens said. “I believe it would be unwise to just throw more money at this problem because money doesn’t fix mismanagement. It also doesn’t help that, not too long ago, almost 90 percent of DSPS staff were still working from home while calls went unanswered.

“Because DSPS is under the complete authority of the executive branch, I am calling on Gov. Evers to finally provide oversight and resolve this mess,” Rep. Kitchens added. “Our current residents and those looking to move here can’t pay their bills with DSPS’s excuses. They deserve so much better than this.”