



Retirement News Highlights

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Lierman transition team recommendations: improve customer service, boost minority business participation

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Maryland Matters

February 28, 2023

Maryland Comptroller Brooke Lierman (D) released a report Monday with dozens of recommendations to improve the state agency of more than 1,000 employees.

Some of the recommendations, which came together through her transition team, are proposals Lierman highlighted during her campaign last year such as improving customer service, creating a new website and increasing diversity participation for small and minority businesses.

Lierman's transition team led by Democratic honorary co-chairs former Comptroller Peter Franchot, Secretary of State Susan Lee and Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks, focused on six topics in the 45-page [report](#): data and innovation, tax administration and customer engagement, pensions and investment, procurement and the Board of Public Works, local government engagement and public engagement.

"The Transition Team's Report represents a new starting point for our agency," Lierman said in a statement. "As the 34th Comptroller of Maryland, I am dedicated to working with our new executive leadership team, all Comptroller employees and partners across the state to reimagine how the Comptroller's Office can build communities that are more equitable, more resilient and more prosperous."

The report outlines myriad challenges for the agency.

For example, some information technology mainframe systems use programming languages dating back to 1959. One recommendation would be for the office to centralize all technology functions in an office overseen by a chief information officer.

Another challenge for the comptroller's office, according to the report, are concerns about transparency and access to the agency. A few proposals to improve the "taxpayer experience" include creating a Taxpayer Services Division to deal with general tax matters and engage with residents proactively. In addition, the transition team made a recommendation to streamline payment processes and offer "in-compromise" programs for residents who need short-term or long-term payment options and for those who endured financial hardships.

The comptroller serves as one of the three members on the Board of Public Works, which reviews and approves millions of dollars in government contracts. The report notes the state's continued failure to meet Minority Business Enterprise goals, currently set at 29% to secure state contracts. In reality, MBE participation rests at about 12%.

One proposal to reach the enterprise goal would be the creation of a one-stop portal for all stages and processes of state procurement. According to the report, it would be easier for agencies to review contracts, vendors to track payments and Board of Public Works members to track compliance on MBE goals.

Lierman could address this and other small business topics Tuesday at a Minority Business Enterprise event at the Westin Hotel in Annapolis where more than 700 Black businesses are scheduled to attend.

Some of the other recommendations in the comptroller report are:

- Develop a recruitment and retention employee plan.
- Incorporate job classifications such as auditor, attorney, or accountant, and establish a separate pay scale “that reflect the uniqueness of the agency,” similar to the Judiciary and Maryland Department of Transportation.
- Modify Board of Public Works agenda items to include a diversity clause and another about climate impact.
- Prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility within the agency.
- Use the branch offices to serve as information centers to collect feedback on how the comptroller’s office is performing, keep track of various concerns and collect data based on race, ethnicity, or age, to assess equity and whether more services are needed in underserved communities.

“The recommendations in this report present huge opportunities – but are also very heavy lifts,” Lierman wrote. “I cannot create the agency that Marylanders deserve alone: implementing these recommendations will be a true team effort. Only working together can we ensure every Maryland community can reach its full potential.”

Pending legislation

The legislature plans to review several bills this legislative session that affect the comptroller’s office.

Del. Nick Charles (D-Prince George’s) sponsors House Bill 429 – which would require the comptroller or a designee to serve on a Procurement Improvement Council – that’s scheduled to be reviewed before the House Health and Government Operations Committee on Wednesday. A cross-filed bill sponsored by Sen. Melony Griffith was heard by the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee last week.

The comptroller’s office requested a bill – House Bill 709 – that would establish a 21st Century Financial Systems Council, which would include the comptroller, state treasurer, secretary of the Department of Budget and Management and others. The panel’s goal would be setting policies and objectives to explore and implement a new financial management information system for all state agencies.

A recommendation to replace the current financial system is highlighted in the comptroller’s transition report. A hearing on the legislation is scheduled for March 14 before the House Appropriations Committee. A senate version will be heard March 9 before the Budget and Taxation Committee.

The comptroller’s office could take on additional duties if the legislature approves the licensing, regulation and taxation of recreation cannabis. Senate Bill 516 is scheduled for a bill hearing March 16

and is co-sponsored by Sens. Brian Feldman (D-Montgomery) and Antonio Hayes (D-Baltimore City). A House version sponsored by Del. C.T. Wilson (D-Charles County) was considered at a Feb. 17 hearing before the Economic Matters Committee.

A couple other bills highlighted in the transition report are Senate Bill 660 and House Bill 707 which would transform the comptroller's ombudsman office into a taxpayer advocate office and employ a minimum of six workers to assist residents with debt collection, tax programs and other issues. The Senate's Budget and Taxation Committee will review the bill March 9 and the House on March 14 before the Ways and Means and Appropriations committees.

[Back to top](#)