**Fiscal Facts: State Government Workforce Churn Reaches Historic Heights**

An alarming picture of the state government workforce emerges from recently published data, which show turnover and vacancy rates among state jobs in Wisconsin reached all-time highs last year.

These developments are perhaps most concerning in state agencies such as the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Corrections, which operate large institutions such as veterans’ homes and prisons – housing populations that require heightened levels of round-the-clock attention.

Overall, our analysis finds that turnover and vacancy rates for state workers (not including University of Wisconsin System workers) rose to record levels in the fiscal year ending in June 2022. In FY 2022, 16.4% of the roughly 28,000 state employees left their jobs -- including 10.2% who left for voluntary (non-retirement) reasons. Meanwhile, 5,770 full-time equivalent positions, or 17.7% of total authorized non-UW state positions, were vacant last June.

Both workforce turnover and vacancies reached their highest levels in a decade in a number of key state agencies. The Department of Veterans Affairs had the highest rate of job turnover, with 27.8% turning over last year. Rates rose to 19.3% within the Department of Corrections and 19.0% at the Department of Health Services. These agencies operate nursing homes, prisons, psychiatric institutions, and other care centers.

High turnover and vacancies in such facilities can require employees to work more overtime, potentially increasing costs for the state and creating additional turnover. While the rate of retirement was higher in 2022 than in nearly every year prior, the turnover spike appears to have been driven mainly by voluntary separations for other reasons.

Fifteen of the 20 largest departments saw their highest rate of voluntary separation in the last decade. When these agencies cannot quickly replace departing staff, vacancies arise. Fifteen of the 20 largest departments saw vacancy rates increase from 2020 to 2022, including seven of the eight departments with at least 1,000 authorized FTE positions.

Rarely do labor data paint so clear a picture: state employees are departing at record rates and leaving more vacancies in their wake. Private turnover has fallen since 2022 and the same may be true in state government, but absent an economic downturn, it's likely to remain an issue.

A failure to address high turnover rates could lead to greater use of overtime, and reduced quality of state services. State lawmakers may wish to weigh these issues in coming weeks as they finish their work on the next state budget (for the two-year cycle starting July 1) and send it to Gov. Tony Evers.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*