STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
STATE EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT COMMISSION

MAY 21, 2020 SERC MEETING
HELD VIA ZOOM
CONVENED AT 9:03 a.m.

Commission Members Present:
Peter Adomeit, Chairman
SAndra Fae Brown Brewton, Trustee
Michael Bailey, Trustee
Karen Buffkin, Trustee
Michael Carey, Trustee
Martha Carlson, Deputy Comptroller, Ex Officio Member
Robert D. Coffey, Trustee
John Flores, Ex Officio Member
Paul Fortier, Trustee
Sal Luciano, Trustee
Karen Nolen, Trustee
Claude Poulin, Trustee
Angel Quiros, Trustee
Mark Sciota, Municipal Liaison

Also Present:
Bruce Barth, Robinson & Cole
Natalie Braswell, Retirement Services Division
Cindy Cieslak, General Counsel, Rose Kallor
John Herrington, Retirement services Division
Colin Newman, Retirement Services Division
John Herrington, Retirement services Division
Colin Newman, Retirement Services Division
Michael Rose, General Counsel, Rose Kallor
Alisha Sullivan, Robinson & Cole
Dan Mara, Attorney for David Carter & Richard Kay

Karen Vibert, LSR #00064

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(860) 291-9191
(Proceeding commenced at 9:03 a.m.)

MR. ADOMEIT: I will call the meeting to order. I will ask people if they would mute their microphones, please, because every time someone talks, the screen shifts to that individual. That would be good. Well, I can't mute mine because I'm talking.

This is the May 21, 2020 meeting of the State Employees Retirement Commission, being held remotely through Zoom.

And trustees present. Cindy, do you have the list, please?

MS. CIESLAK: Certainly. All right. I have Claude Poulin, Mike Bailey, Mark Sciota, Sandra Fae Brown Brewton, Bob Coffey, Sal Luciano, Paul Fortier, Michael Carey, Karen Buffkin. Someone just joined at 6116. Can you let me know who that is?

MS. NOLEN: It's Karen Nolen.

MS. CIESLAK: Good morning, Karen.

All right. We have Karen Nolen. We have Cindy Cieslak. We have Colin Newman. We have Marti Carlson, we have Peter Adomeit, we have John Flores. We have Michael Rose, John Herrington, Natalie Braswell, Alisha Sullivan and Bruce Barth.
Did I miss anyone?

All right. We are all set, Peter.

MR. ADOMEIT: Okay. John Flores, welcome to our meeting and thank you for coming.

MR. FLORES: Thank you for having me.

MR. ADOMEIT: You're very welcome.

We are in compliance with the open meeting laws, which means we have a recording of the meeting, which Cindy has on the computer, and then she sends it out for transcription, and then the transcription is what is posted.

I will remind people -- I'm guilty of doing this myself -- when you speak, please state your name at the outset for the benefit of the person who is transcribing.

Okay. The Chairman's report, and then after that, I'll do the amendments to the agenda.

For some reason, the only person I see on my screen is Claude. I can't see anybody else except on the right.

MS. CIESLAK: Peter, at the top, if you would like, there's something that says, "Gallery View." If you click it, you can get -- or it says, "Speaker View," or, "Gallery View." In Gallery View...
View, you'll be able to see everyone.

MR. ADOMEIT: Okay. Ah, yes. Thank you very much.

The Chairman's report will be brief. First of all, again, I thank everyone who has been participating and making sure that these meetings work and that the Retirement Division is able to fulfill its mission.

My guess is everything takes three times longer to achieve than it does when you're not. That's been my experience. Thank you to all of you folks who participate in all of this to make it work.

The amendment to the agenda. We need a motion to add the Hartford Housing Authority to the agenda.

MR. LUCIANO: So moved.

MR. BAILEY: Second.

MR. ADOMEIT: All in favor say aye.

Opposed nay. The ayes have it. Thank you very much.

I'm going to turn the meeting over now to John Herrington.

MS. CIESLAK: Real quick, John, before you get started -- I apologize that I'm interrupting.
The individual who just joined at 7699, can you let me know who that is?

MR. QUIROS: Angel Quiros.

MS. CIESLAK: Good morning. Thank you.

MS. CARLSON: John, can I hop in just before you? John Herrington?

MR. HERRINGTON: Not a problem.

MS. CARLSON: Is that okay with you, Chair?

MR. ADOMEIT: That's fine. Please proceed.

MS. CARLSON: I'm Marti Carlson, deputy comptroller. I just wanted to state that we at the comptroller's office don't think in terms of days of time out because of COVID, we think of cycles. I want to inform all of you that we are on our fifth biweekly payroll cycle completely remotely for State employees. I have 277 employees on staff. 270 of them are on nearly full remote. We also have had three successful retirement payroll cycles completely remotely.

In addition to that, after stabilizing -- I think we've been out since like March 13th or 14th. After stabilizing the first couple of cycles, our divisions are now deep into
working on their normal everyday projects of reducing backlogs and open enrollment in the health-care cycle.

In addition to that, a couple weeks ago -- I can't remember really how long -- the comptroller was asked to negotiate and manage the vendor contracts for mass testing in the State of Connecticut; that is, collections and testing. So we have Kevin and some other staff led by Natalie Braswell negotiating that.

In addition to that, the executive staff of the comptroller's office has been tasked with standing up the implementation of mass testing of all State employees, to the capacity with everyone else of 240,000 tests a week by the middle of June. That's not just for State employees. That's for everyone.

We're beginning our phase stand-up with those employees of which you represent on the labor side that are front facing and in a larger danger of being exposed to COVID. Those are the health service agencies like DDS and DMHAS and DCF and judicial and DOC.

So we are really busy in the front office. We anticipate getting the infracture stood
up and then being able to hand it off to something
that's more permanent, but I just wanted the
Commission to know, in particular, that the
Retirement Division, which is literally working full
remote, has stabilized for the most part and is
working on the outside projects, the outside of
payroll and not an application processing projects
that you're normally hearing from, led by
John Herrington, which has not been an easy lift to
get everybody safe, at home, and our system working.

The comptroller's office is very
lucky because we are overwhelming technology with
Core-CT, so we have remote access, secure access, to
do virtually anything we need to do. We appreciate
the Retirement Commission's support of that effort
as we move through what's happening on the outside.

That's all I have to say.

MR. ADOMEIT: Thank you, Marti.

Division director's report,

John Herrington.

MR. HERRINGTON: I guess I would like to
echo quite a bit of what Marti has said. These are
definitely difficult and challenging times for the
Division. These would have been challenging times,
even without the COVID and the working remotely. We
have a number of initiatives and projects that we need to work through. We continue to adapt to the new technology, and the present circumstances have just kind of accelerated that effort and increased kind of some of the challenges that we're working through.

For the month of April, we were really focused on ensuring that we could get the day-to-day work done that needed to be done, and, you know, through May and going forward, we're focusing on some of our longer-term projects. You'll see in the disability -- in the director's report for the disability retirements what we have been able to -- and there really hasn't been an interruption to this our No. 1 priority is to reduce the wait time for individuals who have applied for a disability and have provided all of their medical records. We want to ensure that if those conditions are met that no one's going to wait for longer than six months. We hope that the wait times would be, you know, even shorter than that, but you can see on the numbers that back in September, we had 369 pending applications. We continue to have monthly meetings and at this point, we've left -- it's less than half that number. That number has been reduced
to 162, and of all of the numbers, that's where you see kind of a consistent reduction in the backlog and we continue to work through that.

We had kind of a mid-level month in terms of the number of retirements for May. There were 149 retirements. We were able to process all of those. April was certainly a heavy month, so we are focusing now on the disability backlog reduction. We started that kind of in earnest in the early part of the year. Some of those efforts kind of took a back seat over the past couple of months, but we're working through that process, and hopefully by the end of the summer, we'll be back at the point where we're really focusing and really making some serious headway in terms of reducing those numbers.

Some of the challenges that we face, there are some unsettled issues related to the COVID and also some external forces. One of the issues is the proposed consolidation of HR in DAS and the proposal that there would be a consolidation of HR professionals working on retirement, and so we don't necessarily have a timeline for that, but we're working through, with DAS, what that staffing and what that process would look like. There certainly
would be efficiencies to be gained and there
certainly would be kind of like a heightened
understanding of the retirement provisions if we had
a dedicated HR unit. The question would be, you
know, to what extent all State employees would have
access to those resources or resources within the
Retirement Services Division, so we need to really
think carefully about that and work through both
kind of the division of labor and dissemination of
information aspects related to that.

Another challenge that we're dealing
with right now is retirement counseling. Obviously,
where we are now, we are no longer having in-person
group counseling sessions and, you know, query
whether we will, you know, return to that model or
will need to modify that model going forward, so
we're working through our best efforts at getting
the information to the relevant populations in the
best way possible.

Probably our best path forward is to
leverage the technology that we have and, you know,
continue our efforts to release the self-service
tool to the populations, but that's going to require
quite a bit of coordination both within the
comptroller's office and with the different
agencies, and while there's still some uncertainty in terms of what this will look like with the consolidation, that's a process that continues to evolve.

But I will absolutely say that I couldn't be prouder of our staff in dealing with these challenging times and tackling these efforts. I think that the Retirement Division as a whole has done a great job over the past two months, and I expect nothing but more of the same going forward.

MR. ADOMEIT: Thank you, John.

MS. CIESLAK: Peter, I will note that Sal has raised his hand to speak.

MR. ADOMEIT: Go ahead.

MR. LUCIANO: I guess a motion is in order for the director's report, to accept.

MR. BAILEY: Second.

MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

MR. LUCIANO: Point of order.

MR. ADOMEIT: Go ahead.

MR. LUCIANO: Regarding the director's report, I think it's great that the pension piece of HR is consolidated. I think that's really smart. We had so many agencies giving bad information.
Every once in a while, I give Colin something that somebody thought that they had a benefit that they didn't really have because HR just aren't -- don't know what the comptroller knows regarding retirement.

On the other hand, I think there are certain -- there's going to be a loss by having HR centralized, and that is knowledge of the agency and how they functioned, you know, in past practice, et cetera. So I think that's going to be -- that piece of it --

MS. CARLSON: Can I address that for a second?

MR. ADOMEIT: Marti.

MS. CARLSON: So, the retirement piece is combined or is going to be a part of the HR consolidation in which the comptroller's office is going to take responsibility for payroll. I've seen the plan. I agree with you, Sal. They need to leave institutional knowledge back at the agencies. I do see a benefit in consolidating specific tasks into super users, because, as you know, there are agency personnel that don't do as well at retirement processing or payroll as others, so the trigger for this is the 2022 retirement surge, and Mark Bissoni,
our division director of active and pension payroll, has looked at the numbers and the percentage of eligible payroll and retirement processing employees that are eligible to retire is extraordinary, so we're trying to figure that out.

To John's point, you know, having a silo, if you will, of retirement experts or specialists over at DAS in HR will be very helpful, provided they recognize the complexities of certain agencies. I would just point out, DOC retirement applications are extremely complicated, so John Herrington is meeting with DAC -- DAS, rather, on a regular basis to ensure that the capacity to -- the capacity and the competence, I guess is what I would say, to handle those complex, you know, 24/7, 20 and out, particularly hazardous due to the applications are handled appropriately so we don't have more work than we have now.

So, John, you want to add to that?

MR. HERRINGTON: So, I think that certainly there are advantages of consolidation. I think Sal raises the point, I think that we're all aware of. There are many cases that we deal with in any given month. The problem is that the employee, the retiree, the spouse, didn't receive the
information that they needed at the time that they
needed, and to the extent that that's consolidated,
you know, five individuals in DAS, you know, 10
individuals in DAS or (inaudible) individuals here
in Retirement Services Division, there's obviously
some problem with that.

One of the things that we can do to
address that would be to provide, you know, far more
information, you know, on our website, but in terms
of kind of some of the projects that we're working
through, you know, there's quite a bit of work that
we need to do before we get to that point.

We have had conversations with DAS.
What I will say is that there's nothing that's set
in stone and we're talking about, you know, a
transition to this process that, you know, there
always will need to be someone locally available at
some agency. I guess the question would be what the
communication with that cadre of kind of HR
generalists and this one unified unit in DAS, what
that would look like, but that's obviously, you
know, aside from working, whether we've staffed this
properly, kind of the dissemination of information,
that's like the concern going down this
consolidation road.
MS. CARLSON: Sal, to your concern, the comptroller's office, a/k/a, John and I, are going to drive this. There will not be any decisions made at DAS impacting retirement that have not been approved by us.

MR. ADOMEIT: Okay. Thank you, both. Any further discussion?

We'll move on to new matters. Sal?

MS. BUFFKIN: Peter, Mike Rose sent a note to everybody.

MR. ADOMEIT: I'm sorry?

MS. BUFFKIN: Mike Rose sent a note to everybody.

MS. CIESLAK: Peter, Mike would like speak briefly, if you don't mind.

MR. ADOMEIT: I don't see the note. Let me exit to full screen. Go ahead.

MR. ROSE: Cindy just got an email and a phone call from Dan Mara, who is the attorney on Carter and Kay, and he's asking for the password to get into the meeting. To the extent you'd like to discuss it, you could go into executive session on that topic so we can give our discussion points without being recorded.

MR. ADOMEIT: Are you -- is he requesting
to be in the executive session, Mike?

MR. ROSE: No, no. He's requesting the

password for the meeting right now.

MR. ADOMEIT: Oh, okay.

MR. ROSE: If people don't have a problem

with that, we can just give it to him, but we didn't

want to do it without discussing it.

MR. LUCIANO: Give it to him.

MR. BAILEY: Yeah. It's a public meeting.

MR. LUCIANO: So long as he excuses

himself in executive session.

MS. BUFFKIN: We might have to have a

separate -- which typically the way you handle that

is to have a separate dial-in.

MS. BRASWELL: You can ask people to leave

the meeting. You can take them out of the meeting.

MS. BROWN BREWTON: You can take them out?

MS. BRASWELL: Yes.

MS. CIESLAK: I'll be able to take them

out.

There's lot of discussion right now.

I'll help the court reporter identify who's

speaking, but in the future, please identify who's

speaking.

I will send him the login right now.
and, as the host, I'm able to remove people.

Mr. Luciano: Item 1 is on the table, the minutes.

Ms. Cieslak: Was there a second?

Mr. Bailey: Second.

Mr. Adomeit: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

Mr. Luciano: Motion to move item 2.

Mr. Bailey: Second.

Mr. Adomeit: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

Mr. Luciano: Motion to move item 3 with Claude abstaining.

Mr. Bailey: Second.

Mr. Adomeit: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

Mr. Luciano: Motion to accept items 4 through 6.

Mr. Bailey: Second.

Mr. Adomeit: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

Mr. Luciano: Motion to approve items 7 and 8.

Mr. Bailey: Second.

Mr. Adomeit: Any discussion? All in
favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

MR. LUCIANO: Motion to move item 9.
MR. BAILEY: Second.
MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.
MR. LUCIANO: Motion to move items 10 and 11.
MR. BAILEY: Second.
MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.
MR. LUCIANO: Motion to move items 12 and 13.
MR. BAILEY: Second.
MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.
MR. LUCIANO: Motion to move items 14 -- I mean to accept items 14 and 15.
MR. BAILEY: Second.
MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. They ayes have it.
MR. LUCIANO: Motion to move items 16 and 17.
MR. BAILEY: Second.
MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

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MR. LUCIANO: Motion to move item 18.

MR. BAILEY: Second.

MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

MR. LUCIANO: Item 19, Hartford Housing.

MR. BAILEY: Second.

MR. ADOMEIT: All in favor say aye.

Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

Are we in executive session now?

MS. CIESLAK: No. And just to go back to the last item, I don't know if we want to revisit that. There wasn't any point for discussion so I could jump in.

The Housing -- Hartford Housing Authority has a written legal memo and it should have went into executive session. There's nothing really to accept or approve at this point, so I don't know if the item 19 motion was appropriate.

MR. LUCIANO: I'll withdraw it.

MR. ADOMEIT: Okay. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Cindy.

MR. LUCIANO: Motion to go into executive session regarding VCP status update, limit it to the public forum.

MR. BAILEY: Second.
MR. ADOMEIT: Okay. Any discussion? How do we exclude people, Cindy, from executive session?

MS. CIESLAK: The mover should identify who they're inviting in, and anyone who is not invited in, I will remove. So far there's not been any additional attendees in the meeting.

MR. ADOMEIT: All right. Very good. So we'll have a VCP status update report?

MR. BARTH: Good morning, everyone.

MS. CIESLAK: Hold on, Bruce. I don't think the motion has been voted on. It was moved and seconded.

MR. ADOMEIT: I confuse easily at 9:00 in the morning. Thank you very much.

All in favor of going into executive session on item No. 1, signify so by saying aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

MS. CIESLAK: And you are inviting in legal counsel and John Herrington, Natalie Braswell, and Colin Newman?

MR. ADOMEIT: That's correct.

(The Commission was in executive session from 9:28 a.m. until 9:47 a.m.)

MR. ADOMEIT: I didn't hear you.

MS. CIESLAK: * Thank you. Attorney Mara
was just invited in because we exited --

MR. MARA: I've got to go. I've got a Conference call from Philly.

MS. CIESLAK: Attorney Mara is here.

MR. ADOMEIT: Hello, Attorney Mara.

MR. LUCIANO: I'd like to make a motion that we send Rizzio back to the MEB.

MR. COFFEY: Second.

MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor say aye. Opposed nay. They ayes have it.

MR. LUCIANO: I'd like to make a motion to table Hartford Housing to the next Division meeting.

MR. POULIN: Second.

Any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

MS. CIESLAK: Pardon my interruption. Can someone tell me who seconded that motion? I believe it was Claude, but I'd like to confirm.

MR. POULIN: Claude.

MS. CIESLAK: Okay. That was Claude.

Just as a reminder, announce who's speaking.

MR. LUCIANO: I make a motion to adjourn.

MR. ADOMEIT: Do we need a motion on the virtual MEB meetings?
MR. COFFEY: This is Bob Coffey.

MR. ADOMEIT: Yes, Bob?

MR. COFFEY: With respect to the motion on the MEB meetings, I would move that for as long as the State is under emergency management orders from the governor, that anyone who appeals an MEB denial on the basis that he or she was unable to appear to make a statement due to the virtual nature of the MEB meetings, that they be permitted to have the MEB reconsider their application.

MR. BAILEY: Second.

MR. ADOMEIT: Thank you, Bob.

Any further discussion? Hearing none, all in favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

MR. COFFEY: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Commission rescind its correspondence that was sent to Panus in 2015 stating that his disability application would be processed and, as a result, the disability application will not be processed.

MR. BAILEY: Second.

MR. ADOMEIT: Any discussion? Hearing none, in all favor say aye. Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

MR. LUCIANO: I believe now a motion to
adjourn is in order.

MR. BAILEY: Second.

MR. STPHAO: All in favor say aye.

Opposed nay. The ayes have it.

(Concluded at 10:24 a.m.)
STATE OF CONNECTICUT: ss: Bristol

COUNTY OF HARTFORD :

I, Karen Vibert, LSR No. 00064, a Notary Public for the State of Connecticut, do hereby certify that the preceding pages are an accurate transcription of the Connecticut State Employees Retirement Commission regular meeting held electronically via Zoom, convening at 9:03 a.m., on May 21, 2020.

Dated at Bristol, Connecticut, this 26th day of May, 2020.

_________________________
Karen Vibert, Notary Public

My commission expires: 08/31/2024.