

State worker tardiness costs Illinois taxpayers big money

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State government employees working for Illinois' Department of Children and Family Services, or DCFS, racked up 5,002 hours of "tardy time" – instances of unexcused late arrival – in fiscal years 2012 and 2013, but were still paid for the time.¹

Estimated cost to taxpayers: \$180,346.44.

During this same two-year span, DCFS paid out more than \$11.8 million² in overtime, caused in part by work that needed to be made up outside of normal working hours by employees who were late for work.

Overtime work for the state usually costs 1.5 times the regular rate. Because employees who are late to work are also receiving overtime pay, taxpayers are paying for two-and-a-half hours of work, but only getting one hour's worth of services.³

Worse yet, some employees are repeat offenders. For instance, one DCFS employee, who took home more than \$94,000 during 2013, averaged more than two hours of paid tardiness a month. By the end of the year, this employee had been paid for well over three extra days' worth of time for not being at work.⁴

Nearly half of all Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services employees – 45 percent – were recorded as arriving late in 2013. Of these, the average number of late arrivals topped 11 times per person. One employee managed to be tardy 94 days during fiscal year 2013, and 70 employees reported being tardy 40 days or more.⁵

Amazingly, most state agencies could not provide statistics regarding staff tardiness upon request because of antiquated tracking systems. The Illinois Department of Corrections said they "do not have a searchable database for these records" and "the compiling of these records would likely take weeks to complete, and all records would then have to be reviewed by legal staff. ... This would cause an undue burden on staff."

If the trends from DCFS hold true across state government, in the past two fiscal years, some 58,359 hours were never worked but cost taxpayers \$1.77 million. That's the equivalent of losing 15 employees for those two years. If the tardy time had to be made up outside of normal working hours, that's another \$2.65 million in overtime costs that could have been avoided.

Government union contracts make this situation possible.

According to the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees' bargaining agreement covering about 35,000 state workers, "the threshold between late arrival and unauthorized absence is one hour after starting time." Because of this language, employees aren't held to rules outlined in the bargaining agreement's "affirmative attendance policy," and many employees are paid for hours they didn't work.⁶

Workers are expected to show up on time, but are rarely subjected to corrective action if bad behavior persists because their unionized supervisors often benefit from the same system.

Flexibility in arrival time is often associated with salaried workers in the private sector, but private-sector workers rarely get paid for the time they miss as well as the overtime needed to make up backlogged work.

Some government workers are getting the best of both worlds – being paid to be late and being paid for overtime hours. This practice is disrespectful to their fellow co-workers and the people who rely on their services – not to mention taxpayers.

The governor should immediately direct all state agencies not to pay late employees for hours that were not worked. The payroll department of each agency should be directed to process all late arrivals as docked time. Further, no employee should be allowed to accrue overtime if they have reported a late arrival anytime during that same week.

Union contracts that permit this kind of abuse should never pass muster. Wasteful provisions such as this slide under the radar because the contracts are ratified before the public and media watchdogs have a chance to read the fine print.

Going forward, all bargaining agreements between a unit of government and a union should be posted online for 14 days and be the subject of public forum to prevent abuses such as paid tardy time.

Endnotes

¹ Information received through Freedom of Information Act request data from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

² Information received through Freedom of Information Act request data from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

³ Illinois Department of Central Management Services, "The state of Illinois and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31 bargaining agreement (2013-2015)," <http://www2.illinois.gov/cms/Employees/Personnel/Pages/PersonnelLaborRelations.aspx>.

⁴ Information received through Freedom of Information Act request data from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

⁵ Information received through Freedom of Information Act request data from the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services.

⁶ Illinois Department of Central Management Services, "The state of Illinois and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31 bargaining agreement (2013-2015)," <http://www2.illinois.gov/cms/Employees/Personnel/Pages/PersonnelLaborRelations.aspx>.

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