Restoring Merit to the State Civil Service

Ensuring competence in government has never been easy.

However, for decades at the federal level, getting certain jobs required passing a rigorous civil service examination. The tests raised the bar and reputation of these positions, but were eliminated in the 1970s, following radical court rulings based on disparate impact theories, ushering in an anti-merit civil service movement. Since then, government has grown far larger and less efficient, effective, and accountable.

THE SOLUTION

The government must recruit and reward government employees based on merit rather than nepotism, coattails, ideological alignment, or college pedigrees.

WHEN HIRING:

✓ Each state agency should be required to **adopt a framework of at least three objectively measurable competencies** encompassing knowledge, skills, and abilities, and include descriptive information necessary to determine how to measure each.

✓ The state's chief human capital officer will **select existing tests and set passing scores** for each to measure the competencies for each eligible job category. These assessments will:

- **Screen for general aptitude** across all job categories using a norm-referenced standardized assessment of non-technical skills, problem-solving ability, and mastery of basic verbal and numeric abilities.

- **Objectively measure competencies** that are common across many job categories through formal assessment—such as written communication, proficiency with common office tasks, physical ability, and proficiency with commonly used computer hardware and software.

- **Validate job-specific skills** using at least one formal assessment per job category. Other competencies may be assessed using a variety of measures, such as formal and informal assessments, structured interviews, industry-recognized credentials, or completion of a recognized apprenticeship program or other post-secondary education or job training.

✓ **Discrimination is prohibited** based on a candidate's attainment of postsecondary education, political viewpoints, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, or any other characteristics protected by law.

POST-HIRING:

✓ Ensure agency heads **set precise and measurable goals** for their departments.

✓ **Evaluate employees annually** based on a set of objective criteria tied to competency frameworks and measured by regular assessments.

✓ Employees may be **dismissed based on a clear and objective framework tied to formal evaluations** and the competency and assessment frameworks adopted by the state's chief human capital officer.

WHY IT MATTERS

It is important all government agencies are staffed by the most competent candidates. That is why it is imperative that we develop best practices to assess and reward talent, iterate and improve continuously, and resist reflexive bureaucratic resistance to meaningful and measurable accountability.
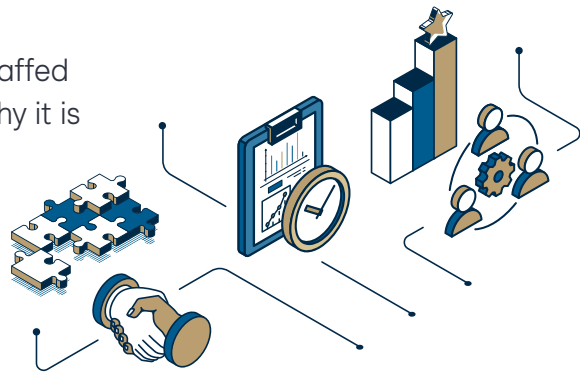
THE BOTTOM LINE:

The government must hire, assess, and reward based on merit. This will ensure government at all levels is more competent, efficient, effective, and accountable.