



**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

**FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION  
OF THE  
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**

In the Matter of Deputy Fire District  
Administrator

Title Creation/Inactivation

CSC Docket No. 2019-187

**ISSUED: September 24, 2018 (SLD)**

The Division of Agency Services (Agency Services) requests the establishment of the unclassified title of Deputy Fire District Administrator for use in local fire districts. Agency Services also requests the inactivation of the unclassified title of Secretary to Executive Director.

In support of its request, Agency Services presents that fire districts are established pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 40A:14-70 et seq.* *N.J.S.A. 40A:14-70* specifically designates a fire district as a "body corporate." As such, a fire district is not considered a municipal department and therefore is not permitted to utilize the unclassified title of Municipal Department Head. Consequently, the unclassified Fire District Administrator title was created in 2012 for use in local fire districts. *See In the Matter of Fire District Administrator* (CSC, decided December 19, 2012). In that decision, the Civil Service Commission (Commission) stated that the purpose of the title creation was to enable the boards of commissioners of local fire districts to make appointments for the oversight of the business affairs of the fire district. The Fire District Administrator serves a similar role within a fire district to that of a civilian Municipal Department Head in a municipal fire department or public safety department, and serves as the highest-level civilian appointee in a fire district and is subject only to the legislative supervision and control of the elected Board of Fire Commissioners.

Agency Services notes that the instant request is from Lakewood Fire District No. 1 which indicates that it is not practical for one administrator to address all of the issues that arise within the organization. Moreover, it notes that

there are currently no titles that allows an incumbent to assist the Fire District Administrator in the management and administration of a part-paid, part-volunteer fire district. Therefore, it asserts that establishing an unclassified Deputy Fire District Administrator title will address this need.

Specifically, Agency Services maintains that the title should be created and allocated to the unclassified service since it requires the possession of knowledge, skills and the exercise of duties and functions so unique that “merit and fitness” for the position cannot be ascertained through a competitive examination process. Specifically, as a second-in-command to the Fire District Administrator, the Deputy Fire District Administrator will perform high-level managerial duties to assist in the administration of fire district affairs. Persons appointed to such positions would be expected to bring to the job the knowledge, skills and abilities required to effectively participate in the management of varied business, administrative and financial operations within the fire district. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to, planning for the effective utilization of available resources, managing activities related to purchasing, personnel and budget, and providing advice and recommendations to the Fire District Administrator and the Board of Fire Commissioners on policy and legislative matters. Further, given the nature and complexities of the position, incumbents will be required to establish a trusted working relationship with elected members of the Board of Fire Commissioners. Therefore, given the complex and varied nature of the duties of a Deputy Fire District Administrator, and the requirement that the incumbents in the title possess qualities enabling them to foster a productive confidential relationship with members of the Board of Fire Commissioners, the requisite skills and abilities are not amenable to Civil Service testing.

Finally, Agency Services also requests the inactivation of the unclassified title of Secretary to Executive Director (06115). Specifically, it asserts that the title has been unencumbered for over two years with no articulated plans for future use.

## CONCLUSION

In matters involving the question of whether a particular title should be allocated to the career or unclassified service, the starting point is the *New Jersey Constitution*, Article VII, sec. 1, par. 2, providing that:

Appointments and promotions in the civil service of the State, and of such political subdivisions as may be provided by law, shall be made according to merit and fitness to be ascertained, *as far as practicable, by examination*, which, as far as practicable, shall be competitive; except that preference in appointments by reason of active service in any branch of the military or naval forces of the United States in time of war may be provided by law (emphasis added).

An interpretation of Civil Service law governing the unclassified service must be made in view of this constitutional mandate and a strict interpretation is generally given in matters concerning allocation to the unclassified service. See *In the Matter of Investigator, Penal Institution, et al., Essex County* (MSB, decided September 16, 1997).

In local service, *N.J.S.A.* 11A:3-5 provides that the unclassified service shall be limited to those titles it specifically designates and all other titles created by other statutes or as the Commission may determine in accordance with criteria established by rule. *N.J.A.C.* 4A:3-1.1(a) provides that all job titles shall be allocated to the career service, except for those job titles allocated by the Commission to the unclassified service pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 4A:3-1.3. *N.J.A.C.* 4A:3-1.3(a) provides that a title shall be allocated to the unclassified service when:

- 1) In State service, the title is so designated under *N.J.S.A.* 11A:3-4;
- 2) In local service, the title is so designated under *N.J.S.A.* 11A:3-5;
- 3) The title is designated unclassified by another specific statute;
- 4) A specific statute provides that incumbents in the title serve for a fixed term or at the pleasure of the appointing authority; *or*
- 5) The Civil Service Commission determines that it is not practicable to determine merit and fitness for appointment in or promotion to that title by examination and that it is not appropriate to make permanent appointments to the title.

Our courts have recognized the State's strong public policy, as evinced by the State Constitution, favoring the inclusion of as many titles as possible in the career service. See, *Walsh v. Department of Civil Service*, 32 *N.J. Super.* 39, 43-44 (App. Div. 1954); *Loboda v. Clark Township*, 40 *N.J.* 424, 434 (1983); *State v. Clark*, 15 *N.J.* 334, 341 (1954); *In the Matter of Hudson County Probation Department*, 178 *N.J. Super.* 362, 371 (App. Div. 1981). This principle of ascertaining "merit and fitness" for promotions and appointments through an open-competitive examination process is at the very heart of our merit system.

At this juncture, it must be noted that in *In the Matter of Karl A. Shelley, Sharon K. Zimmerman and Moorestown Township Fire District No. 1*, Docket No. A-1744-94T2 (App. Div. March 20, 1996) (*Shelley*), the Appellate Division, Superior Court of New Jersey, upheld the former Merit System Board's (Board) denial of Moorestown Township's request to create the position of Fire District Administrator in the unclassified service. In *Shelley*, the request to create the unclassified Fire District Administrator title was denied due to the fact that the Moorestown Fire

Commissioners had not presented any arguments that it was impracticable to determine the merit and fitness for appointment to the title through competitive examination. Moreover, it could not be considered a principal executive officer in accordance with *N.J.A.C.* 4A:3-1.3(c) because the Fire District Administrator is statutorily subject to the executive authority of the Fire Commissioners. See *N.J.S.A.* 40A:14-81.1.

In *In the Matter of Township of Burlington Fire District No. 1* (MSB, decided February 11, 2004), the Board authorized the creation of the unclassified title of Director of Fire Services only for Fire Districts with an all-volunteer force. In authorizing the creation of Director of Fire Services, the Board emphasized the challenges faced by an all-volunteer fire fighting department and the need to have a leader with an understanding of fiscal problems, personnel and labor relations, technological changes, public relations, and changes in the fire fighting field. Further, it applied *Ogden v. Department of Civil Service*, 77 *N.J. Super.* 296 (App. Div. 1962), cert. denied, 39 *N.J.* 238 (1963) and *Milton v. Department of Civil Service*, 71 *N.J. Super.* 135 (App. Div. 1961) and concluded that the position of Director of Fire Services was akin to that of a municipal department head.

In *Ogden v. Department of Civil Service*, supra, the Appellate Division held that, given the complex nature of the duties and the uniqueness of the position of General Superintendent and Chief Engineer of the Passaic Valley Water Commission, it was not practical to determine merit and fitness for the position by examination or minimum qualification requirements. In that case, the subject position was the highest ranking full-time position in the employ of the Water Commission, answerable only to the four Commissioners whose role was analogous to that of a governing body. Moreover, since the Commissioners themselves served only part-time in the role of trustees and lacked technical training, they necessarily relied on the General Superintendent and Chief Engineer for guidance. Additionally, concurring with the findings made by the Department, the court noted the many complex duties and required abilities of the General Superintendent and Chief Engineer, involving knowledge of engineering, administration, fiscal policies, expansion programs, personnel problems, and public relations. The court further underscored the importance of the confidential relationship that must exist between the Commissioners and the General Superintendent and Chief Engineer and the fact that the Commissioners leaned heavily on this individual for advice and guidance in creating and implementing policy. Furthermore, adding to the complexity of the position was the consideration that the incumbent would be responsible for leading a workforce of 275 employees. Lastly, applying the four-part test enunciated in *Milton v. Department of Civil Service*, supra, the court concurred with the Department's finding that the position in question was analogous to that of head of a municipal department.

In *Milton, supra*, the Appellate Division determined that a municipal Superintendent of Public Properties, responsible for a department having 55 employees, was an unclassified municipal department head. In its analysis, the *Milton* court delineated four factors to be considered in assessing whether a position constitutes a department head and is therefore properly designated as unclassified: 1) whether the position allows the incumbent to hire, fire, and exercise control over subordinates; 2) whether the incumbent is in fact a subordinate of another officer of the municipality; 3) whether the nature of the duties performed are important and substantial, and not merely administrative; and 4) whether office space was provided for the incumbent in a municipal building. The court observed that the incumbent had sole and exclusive administrative control over his department and was subject only to the legislative control of the municipality.

In *Fire District Administrator, supra*, the Commission noted that the title of Fire District Administrator was not specifically designated by *N.J.S.A. 11A:3-5*, there was no specific statutory authority for the creation of an unclassified title for the position, and there was no statutory provision allowing for the appointment of an incumbent in the title to serve for a fixed term or at the pleasure of an appointing authority. However, the Commission found that it was not practicable to determine merit and fitness by examination for the title. Specifically, the Commission noted that unlike in *Shelly, supra*, Agency Services determined that it was not practicable to determine merit and fitness for the title of Fire District Administrator by examination. Further, it noted that *N.J.S.A. 40A:14-81* grants Fire Commissioners the powers, duties, and functions within the district to the same extent as in the case of municipalities relating to the prevention and extinguishment of fires and the regulations of fire hazards. Indeed, *N.J.S.A. 40A:14-81.3* specifies that supervisory authority over personnel of a fire district may be exercised by the Fire Commissioners *or delegated*, by resolution, to any commissioner, *or any employee or employees thereof*. Furthermore, the Commission found that, as evidenced by *Burlington Fire District No. 1, supra*, the need for an unclassified position to administer the affairs of all-volunteer Fire Districts was well documented. Additionally, given the level and breadth of the position's responsibilities and the fact that the position incumbent would only be answerable to the governing body, in this case the Fire Commissioners, and would retain sole administrative control over a Fire District's employees, like in *Milton* and *Ogden, supra*, and consistent with the Board of Fire Commissioners' statutory right to delegate supervisory functions over personnel, the position was equivalent to that of a municipal department head. Thus, the Commission concluded that there was good cause to permit the creation of the unclassified Fire District Administrator title to enable Fire Commissioners of fire districts to make appointments of chief administrators to oversee their business affairs.

In the instant matter, Agency Services argues, that like the title of Fire District Administrator, that it is also impracticable to determine merit and fitness

by examination for the title of Deputy Fire District Administrator. Specifically, as a second-in-command to the Fire District Administrator, the Deputy Fire District Administrator will perform high-level managerial duties to assist in the administration of fire district affairs. Persons appointed to such positions would be expected to bring to the job the knowledge, skills and abilities required to effectively participate in the management of varied business, administrative and financial operations within the fire district. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to, planning for the effective utilization of available resources, managing activities related to purchasing, personnel and budget, and providing advice and recommendations to the Fire District Administrator and the Board of Fire Commissioners on policy and legislative matters. Further, given the nature and complexities of the position, incumbents will be required to establish a trusted working relationship with elected members of the Board of Fire Commissioners; thus, a permanent appointment to the title is not appropriate. Therefore, given the complex and varied nature of the duties of a Deputy Fire District Administrator, and the requirement that the incumbents in the title possess qualities enabling them to foster a productive confidential relationship with members of the Board of Fire Commissioners, the requisite skills and abilities are not amenable to Civil Service testing. Thus, the Commission concludes that there is good cause to permit the creation of the unclassified Deputy Fire District Administrator title.

Finally, the Commission also finds good cause to inactivate the unclassified title of Secretary to Executive Director (06115). Specifically, the title has been unencumbered for over two years with no articulated plans for future use.

### **ORDER**

Therefore, it is ordered that this request be granted and that the title of Deputy Fire District Administrator is established in the unclassified service to be utilized only in paid, and part-paid, part-volunteer Fire Districts established pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 40A:14-70 et seq.*

It is also ordered that the request be granted to inactivate the unclassified title of Secretary to Executive Director.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in a judicial forum.

DECISION RENDERED BY THE  
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION ON  
THE 20TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2018



Deirdré L. Webster Cobb  
Chairperson  
Civil Service Commission

Inquiries  
and  
Correspondence

Christopher Myers  
Director  
Division of Appeals and Regulatory Affairs  
Civil Service Commission  
Written Record Appeals Unit  
P.O. Box 312  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0312

c: Kelly Glenn  
Vincent J. Vitiello, Jr.  
Larry Loigman, Esq.  
Records Unit