



CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

Elaine M. Howle, State Auditor

FACT SHEET

Date: April 23, 2009

Report: 2008-107

The California State Auditor released the following report today:

Temporary Workers in Local Government

Although Some Workers Have Limited Opportunities, Most Have Reasonable Access to Permanent Employment and Earn the Same Wage Rates as Permanent Workers

BACKGROUND

California's local governments—comprised primarily of cities and counties—are governed either by the State's general law or by charters. Cities and counties with charters generally have more autonomy in managing their employees than do those governed by general law. State law permits local governments to establish their own merit employment systems and personnel standards. California's cities and counties can use short-term or temporary (at-will) employees for filling an immediate need or seasonal work. Policies regarding the use of temporary workers differ in each local government because each has its own unique laws, contracts, and agreements. Oftentimes temporary workers have limits on how many hours they may work. Additionally, counties hire *per diem* (paid by the day) workers for positions that are difficult to fill, such as health care workers. The number of temporary workers varies among the cities and counties that we reviewed—52.4 percent of the workforce for one city and only 16.1 percent for one county.

KEY FINDINGS

Our review focused on the use of temporary employees at six local governments that are governed by general law. Specifically, we reviewed the use of temporary workers by the cities of Escondido and Fremont and the counties of Contra Costa, Kern, Riverside, and San Joaquin. We noted the following:

- ◆ Of the 78 job classifications we reviewed at four local governments, employees in only 11 job classifications had limited opportunities to move to permanent jobs. The remaining 67 classifications constituted true temporary jobs that generally lasted for a relatively short time, were *per diem* and employees worked on a temporary basis by choice, or were jobs in which employees had good opportunities to get permanent jobs.
- ◆ Based on the results of 230 responses to our survey of 594 temporary workers from the six local governments, respondents from the cities were more likely than respondents from the counties to be temporary workers by choice and less likely to have applied for permanent jobs with their local government employers.
- ◆ Although hourly pay rates generally are similar, none of the local governments we reviewed provide temporary workers all of the common benefits, including retirement, health, dental, vision, vacation, sick leave, and paid holidays, offered to permanent employees or at-will management. Furthermore, most only offer certain benefits to temporary employees after they have worked for a specified period of time.
- ◆ Temporary employees worked beyond the limits set by their local governments in five of the six local governments we reviewed: three had relatively few workers who exceeded the applicable limits and two had a significant number—Contra Costa and Riverside had 113 and 492 employees, respectively, who exceeded established limits. Although the reasons the counties provided for a sample of those employees exceeding work time limits seem reasonable, Contra Costa did not have evidence to support its statements, while Riverside was able to support its authorization for most of those sampled.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that temporary employees do not work beyond the prescribed time limits, we recommended that the counties of Contra Costa and Riverside improve their processes for identifying workers approaching the limits and, along with San Joaquin, should document requests and approvals for workers to exceed the limits. To address issues identified by the joint management-labor committee created to review Contra Costa's use of temporary employees, the county should continue negotiations with employee organizations to reach resolution on the committee's recommendations.

