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Training agencies combined

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SPRINGFIELD - The Hampden County Employment and Training Consortium will be eliminated on July 1 through a merger with a regional agency.

Mayor Charles V. Ryan announced the merger yesterday, saying the 23 employees of the consortium will be transferred to the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County and will no longer be city employees. As a city agency, the consortium's salaries and employee benefits have been funded by the city with full reimbursement from state and federal grants.

During a press conference at City Hall, Ryan and leaders of both agencies said the merger eliminates duplication of efforts and makes for a more efficient and effective service for the county's workforce and employers. Savings of at least \$200,000 annually will be transferred to direct services, they said.

No employees will be eliminated, but two vacancies will not be filled, officials said.

The Regional Employment Board is a business-led, nonprofit corporation that serves as the primary policymaking authority in developing workforce skills in the county.

"This is a significant step forward," Ryan said. "I think that the short and, in some cases, tumultuous history of the consortium as an entity of the city of Springfield is about to come to an end."

The consortium, which has provided education, job-training and employment-related services in the region, was rocked in 2002 when two of its top officials quit and were later convicted in connection with a federal corruption probe.

The consortium's former executive director, James W. Asselin, and its former compliance officer, James F. Krzystofik, were both sentenced to prison terms after pleading guilty to swindling a taxpayer-funded loan program for \$600,000 in bogus consulting fees and travel.

The combined budgets of the two agencies was \$10 million in state and federal funds, merging into one budget on July 1. The mayor will continue to appoint all members of the Regional Employment Board thus retaining "ample control" over the board, he said.

The employment board's executive director, J. William Ward, said the merger, which was discussed for a number of years, allows for the "utmost of efficiency."

Michael D. Niziolek, chairman of the Regional Employment Board, and Peter J. Daboul, long-term past chairman, both praised the mayor's decision, and took part in the discussions to bring about the merger.

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