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LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA

ONE HUNDRED SIXTH LEGISLATURE

FIRST SESSION

LEGISLATIVE BILL 724

Introduced by Vargas, 7; Cavanaugh, 6; Pansing Brooks, 28; Wayne, 13; Wishart, 27.

Read first time January 23, 2019

Committee:

A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to the Nebraska Advantage Act; to amend sections 77-5701, 77-5723, and 77-5731, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska; to state findings; to provide requirements for boards of directors in order to qualify for incentives; to harmonize provisions; and to repeal the original sections.

Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

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Section 1. Section 77-5701, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

77-5701 Sections 77-5701 to 77-5735 and section 2 of this act shall be known and may be cited as the Nebraska Advantage Act.

Sec. 2. (1) The Legislature finds and declares that:

(a) Nationwide and in Nebraska, women are paid significantly less than men. In addition to wage disparity, women make up a small share of top leadership positions in private businesses. In recent years, women have made some gains in leadership positions, and experience has shown that the increase of women in leadership is helping businesses thrive in unprecedented ways. For over fifty years, equal pay laws have sought to remedy persistent disparities based on sex and gender in the workplace. Nevertheless, gender-based disparities with regard to pay and leadership status persist and have created a wage gap in Nebraska negatively impacting working women, working families, our state budget, and our state and national economies;

(b) The persistent gender disparities illustrate that this state must do better and must modernize its equal pay laws with innovative and creative policy strategies. Research shows that if the state waits for a private market correction, Nebraska women will not realize equal pay for equal work until 2066. That pace is unacceptable. The state must be proactive and take additional steps to make equal pay a reality; and

(c) The Nebraska Advantage Act encourages and rewards employers that invest in Nebraska and its workforce. One of the stated goals of the act is to promote the creation and retention of new, quality jobs in Nebraska. Quality jobs are jobs provided by employers that recognize that women are a significant portion of Nebraska's workforce and that provide for pay and employment equity for women, including equity in leadership.

(2) For any taxpayer that is a domestic corporation with a board of directors, such taxpayer shall not qualify for any incentives under the Nebraska Advantage Act unless at least one-half of the members of the

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taxpayer's board of directors are female. Such requirement shall continue to apply to the taxpayer throughout the entitlement period. If a taxpayer fails to meet such requirement at any time during the entitlement period, such failure shall be treated in the same manner as a failure to maintain the required level of employment for purposes of recapture and disallowance of incentives under section 77-5727.

(3) For purposes of this section, female means an individual who self-identifies as a woman, without regard to the individual's designated sex at birth.

(4) This section applies to applications submitted on and after the effective date of this act.

Sec. 3. Section 77-5723, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

77-5723 (1) In order to utilize the incentives set forth in the Nebraska Advantage Act, the taxpayer shall file an application, on a form developed by the Tax Commissioner, requesting an agreement with the Tax Commissioner.

(2) The application shall contain:

(a) A written statement describing the plan of employment and investment for a qualified business in this state;

(b) Sufficient documents, plans, and specifications as required by the Tax Commissioner to support the plan and to define a project;

(c) If more than one location within this state is involved, sufficient documentation to show that the employment and investment at different locations are interdependent parts of the plan. A headquarters shall be presumed to be interdependent with each other location directly controlled by such headquarters. A showing that the parts of the plan would be considered parts of a unitary business for corporate income tax purposes shall not be sufficient to show interdependence for the purposes of this subdivision;

(d) A nonrefundable application fee of one thousand dollars for a

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tier 1 project, two thousand five hundred dollars for a tier 2, tier 3, or tier 5 project, five thousand dollars for a tier 4 project, and ten thousand dollars for a tier 6 project. The fee shall be credited to the Nebraska Incentives Fund; ~~and~~

(e) A timetable showing the expected sales tax refunds and what year they are expected to be claimed. The timetable shall include both direct refunds due to investment and credits taken as sales tax refunds as accurately as possible; and ~~.~~

(f) If the taxpayer is a domestic corporation with a board of directors, information regarding the gender of the members of the board of directors at the time of application and, if necessary, a timetable showing the year the taxpayer expects to meet the requirements in section 2 of this act with respect to its board of directors. This subdivision applies to applications submitted on and after the effective date of this act.

The application and all supporting information shall be confidential except for the name of the taxpayer, the location of the project, the amounts of increased employment and investment, and the information required to be reported by sections 77-5731 and 77-5734.

(3) An application must be complete to establish the date of the application. An application shall be considered complete once it contains the items listed in subsection (2) of this section, regardless of the Tax Commissioner's additional needs pertaining to information or clarification in order to approve or not approve the application.

(4) Once satisfied that the plan in the application defines a project consistent with the purposes stated in the Nebraska Advantage Act in one or more qualified business activities within this state, that the taxpayer and the plan will qualify for benefits under the act, and that the required levels of employment and investment for the project will be met prior to the end of the fourth year after the year in which the application was submitted for a tier 1, tier 3, or tier 6 project or the

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end of the sixth year after the year in which the application was submitted for a tier 2, tier 4, or tier 5 project, the Tax Commissioner shall approve the application. For a tier 5 project that is sequential to a tier 2 large data center project, the required level of investment shall be met prior to the end of the fourth year after the expiration of the tier 2 large data center project entitlement period relating to direct sales tax refunds.

(5) The Tax Commissioner shall make his or her determination to approve or not approve an application within one hundred eighty days after the date of the application. If the Tax Commissioner requests, by mail or by electronic means, additional information or clarification from the taxpayer in order to make his or her determination, such one-hundred-eighty-day period shall be tolled from the time the Tax Commissioner makes the request to the time he or she receives the requested information or clarification from the taxpayer. The taxpayer and the Tax Commissioner may also agree to extend the one-hundred-eighty-day period. If the Tax Commissioner fails to make his or her determination within the prescribed one-hundred-eighty-day period, the application shall be deemed approved.

(6) Within one hundred eighty days after approval of the application, the Tax Commissioner shall prepare and mail a written agreement to the taxpayer for the taxpayer's signature. The taxpayer and the Tax Commissioner shall enter into a written agreement. The taxpayer shall agree to complete the project, and the Tax Commissioner, on behalf of the State of Nebraska, shall designate the approved plan of the taxpayer as a project and, in consideration of the taxpayer's agreement, agree to allow the taxpayer to use the incentives contained in the Nebraska Advantage Act. The application, and all supporting documentation, to the extent approved, shall be considered a part of the agreement. The agreement shall state:

(a) The levels of employment and investment required by the act for

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the project;

(b) The time period under the act in which the required levels must be met;

(c) The documentation the taxpayer will need to supply when claiming an incentive under the act;

(d) The date the application was filed; and

(e) A requirement that the company update the Department of Revenue annually on any changes in plans or circumstances which affect the timetable of sales tax refunds as set out in the application. If the company fails to comply with this requirement, the Tax Commissioner may defer any pending sales tax refunds until the company does comply.

(7) The incentives contained in section 77-5725 shall be in lieu of the tax credits allowed by the Nebraska Advantage Rural Development Act for any project. In computing credits under the act, any investment or employment which is eligible for benefits or used in determining benefits under the Nebraska Advantage Act shall be subtracted from the increases computed for determining the credits under section 77-27,188. New investment or employment at a project location that results in the meeting or maintenance of the employment or investment requirements, the creation of credits, or refunds of taxes under the Employment and Investment Growth Act shall not be considered new investment or employment for purposes of the Nebraska Advantage Act. The use of carryover credits under the Employment and Investment Growth Act, the Invest Nebraska Act, the Nebraska Advantage Rural Development Act, or the Quality Jobs Act shall not preclude investment and employment from being considered new investment or employment under the Nebraska Advantage Act. The use of property tax exemptions at the project under the Employment and Investment Growth Act shall not preclude investment not eligible for the property tax exemption from being considered new investment under the Nebraska Advantage Act.

(8) A taxpayer and the Tax Commissioner may enter into agreements

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for more than one project and may include more than one project in a single agreement. The projects may be either sequential or concurrent. A project may involve the same location as another project. No new employment or new investment shall be included in more than one project for either the meeting of the employment or investment requirements or the creation of credits. When projects overlap and the plans do not clearly specify, then the taxpayer shall specify in which project the employment or investment belongs.

(9) The taxpayer may request that an agreement be modified if the modification is consistent with the purposes of the act and does not require a change in the description of the project. An agreement may not be modified to a tier that would grant a higher level of benefits to the taxpayer or to a tier 1 project. Once satisfied that the modification to the agreement is consistent with the purposes stated in the act, the Tax Commissioner and taxpayer may amend the agreement. For a tier 6 project, the taxpayer must agree to limit the project to qualified activities allowable under tier 2 and tier 4.

Sec. 4. Section 77-5731, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is amended to read:

77-5731 (1) The Tax Commissioner shall submit electronically an annual report to the Legislature no later than July 15 of each year. The Department of Revenue shall, on or before September 1 of each year, appear at a joint hearing of the Appropriations Committee of the Legislature and the Revenue Committee of the Legislature and present the report. Any supplemental information requested by three or more committee members shall be presented within thirty days after the request.

(2) The report shall list (a) the agreements which have been signed during the previous year, (b) the agreements which are still in effect, (c) the identity of each taxpayer who is party to an agreement, and (d) the location of each project.

(3) The report shall also state, for taxpayers who are parties to

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agreements, by industry group (a) the specific incentive options applied for under the Nebraska Advantage Act, (b) the refunds allowed on the investment, (c) the credits earned, (d) the credits used to reduce the corporate income tax and the credits used to reduce the individual income tax, (e) the credits used to obtain sales and use tax refunds, (f) the credits used against withholding liability, (g) the number of jobs created under the act, (h) the expansion of capital investment, (i) the estimated wage levels of jobs created under the act subsequent to the application date, (j) the total number of qualified applicants, (k) the projected future state revenue gains and losses, (l) the sales tax refunds owed, (m) the credits outstanding under the act, (n) the value of personal property exempted by class in each county under the act, (o) the value of property for which payments equal to property taxes paid were allowed in each county, ~~and~~ (p) the total amount of the payments, and (o) the percentage of female members on the boards of directors of such taxpayers.

(4) In estimating the projected future state revenue gains and losses, the report shall detail the methodology utilized, state the economic multipliers and industry multipliers used to determine the amount of economic growth and positive tax revenue, describe the analysis used to determine the percentage of new jobs attributable to the Nebraska Advantage Act assumption, and identify limitations that are inherent in the analysis method.

(5) The report shall provide an explanation of the audit and review processes of the department in approving and rejecting applications or the grant of incentives and in enforcing incentive recapture. The report shall also specify the median period of time between the date of application and the date the agreement is executed for all agreements executed by December 31 of the prior year.

(6) The report shall provide information on project-specific total incentives used every two years for each approved project. The report

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shall disclose (a) the identity of the taxpayer, (b) the location of the project, and (c) the total credits used and refunds approved during the immediately preceding two years expressed as a single, aggregated total. The incentive information required to be reported under this subsection shall not be reported for the first year the taxpayer attains the required employment and investment thresholds. The information on first-year incentives used shall be combined with and reported as part of the second year. Thereafter, the information on incentives used for succeeding years shall be reported for each project every two years containing information on two years of credits used and refunds approved. The incentives used shall include incentives which have been approved by the department, but not necessarily received, during the previous two years.

(7) The report shall include an executive summary which shows aggregate information for all projects for which the information on incentives used in subsection (6) of this section is reported as follows: (a) The total incentives used by all taxpayers for projects detailed in subsection (6) of this section during the previous two years; (b) the number of projects; (c) the new jobs at the project for which credits have been granted; (d) the average compensation paid employees in the state in the year of application and for the new jobs at the project; and (e) the total investment for which incentives were granted. The executive summary shall summarize the number of states which grant investment tax credits, job tax credits, sales and use tax refunds for qualified investment, and personal property tax exemptions and the investment and employment requirements under which they may be granted.

(8) No information shall be provided in the report that is protected by state or federal confidentiality laws.

Sec. 5. Original sections 77-5701, 77-5723, and 77-5731, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, are repealed.