

Rooney Award: Leadership in State Human Resource Management (Individual)

Please include the following information in the electronic nomination: Nominee, Title, State, Agency, Telephone, Fax, E-mail, and brief biography (one paragraph in length). Also include the following: Nominator's Name, Title, State, Agency, Address, Telephone, Fax, and e-mail. Nominations should be submitted via e-mail to Leslie Scott at lscott@csg.org in Word or PDF format.

Nominee: Thomas B. Stephens, Secretary
Kentucky Personnel Cabinet
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Nominator(s): Lesley Bilby, Deputy Secretary	LaDonna Koebel, Chief of Staff
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1. Describe how the nominee has demonstrated leadership by participating on major state government committees, task forces and/or special projects related to state human resource management.

It is our pleasure to nominate Personnel Cabinet Secretary Thomas B. Stephens for the Rooney Award. Tom Stephens is a true visionary for the Commonwealth, spearheading a number of enterprise-wide solutions for recruitment, retention and training of state employees through a modern, interactive human resources system (careers.ky.gov & MyPurpose.ky.gov). Among other successes, his vision resulted in the Executive Branch utilizing technology to promote jobs by giving agencies the ability to embed custom video advertisements with job posts; and established a portal to make personal and professional development a true job benefit for public employees, as well as a cost-saving means of providing professional development opportunities 24/7.

The potential savings of the solution is easily hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars saved in training costs, and incomparable value and improvement to the recruitment of employees in a climate of low unemployment. All of this accomplished with no additional fiscal

appropriations due to savvy solutions and contract consolidation. Tom's broad vision with the "MyPURPOSE" system encompassed solutions for recruitment, professional development, networking and problem solving among employees with a "connect" feature, and even the branding and marketing of the system.

Tom is a proven leader in Kentucky human resource management. Through his vision and leadership, the Commonwealth is moving the needle on modernizing our state's human resources system. Some of his accomplishments include:

- 2019 Legislative Initiatives for Auto-Enrollment in Kentucky Deferred Compensation's Supplemental Retirement Plans – As a member of the Deferred Compensation Board, Tom is acutely aware that public employees have an incredible resource in the official supplemental retirement / 401(k) & 457(b) investment opportunities offered without commissions through payroll deduction. Tom was integrally involved in getting legislation passed for auto enrollment of new employees in deferred compensation (which will begin July 1, 2019). In the absence of auto-enrollment, the participation rate among new hires is approximately 20%. With auto-enrollment those numbers reverse and plans see an 80% participation rate! This contributes to the financial wellbeing of employees. He has also facilitated greater engagement with public school systems who participate in the Deferred Compensation program;
- Tom also spearheaded Veterans Preference legislation to expand preference for interviews for merit positions to include spouses and widows(ers) of service members;
- Instrumental in leading Kentucky's \$2Billion self-insured health plan and serving on the Kentucky Group Health Insurance Board.

- Conducted a Dependent Eligibility Verification Audit on behalf of the Kentucky Employees' Health Plan resulting in **\$13.4 Million** in annual savings for plan members;
- Key member of the Kentucky "Work Matters" Task Force – In this capacity, he examined obstacles to employment for five populations, including people with disabilities, veterans, foster youth, individuals with criminal records, and individuals with substance use disorders, and proposed policy solutions to remove those barriers;
- Creation of a mobile app for state employees - Tom's vision for the Commonwealth included conceptualizing and spearheading the creation of a mobile app to share updates and alerts to employees. The app can also be used by job applicants to easily view and apply for jobs. The Kentucky Personnel Cabinet mobile app provides quick links to pay stubs, electronic time keeping, benefits, health insurance, social media, and a TipLine to anonymously report fraud and abuse;
- Implemented a locality premium and critical position premium in the compensation plan;
- Implemented the Fair Chance Employment initiative by removing criminal background check questions from the state employee application;
- Spearheaded dental and vision insurance coverage for public employees, and
- Reinvigorated the mediation program, hosting the first two groups of trainees in many years.

Tom has been Kentucky's greatest champions for developing a "talent brand" and in creating a culture that fosters employee growth and a desire to serve a higher "purpose." Tom's leadership in these projects and as a member of NASPE's Executive Committee make him the ideal candidate for the prestigious Rooney Award.

2. Describe how the nominee has demonstrated exceptional leadership in the field of human resource management beyond your state human resources organization.

Tom does not talk the talk, he truly walks the walk. Through Tom's vision and direction, we have expanded the state's EEO Diversity and Leadership Conference to include private sector partners and HR professionals outside of state government. The conference has tripled in size over the last three years, becoming Kentucky's premier diversity and inclusion conference, with representative speakers and attendees from several large corporate entities with a national presence.

3. Describe the nominee's leadership and/or management skills in implementing human resource management programs

Tom knows how to put the right people in the right positions within the Personnel Cabinet to truly make an impact on the Commonwealth's public servants, while doing so with a high level of integrity and dedication to the HR and legal profession. He is the first to recognize key areas where state government human resources will benefit from modernization, and the first to realize there is potential for growth and change. He often tells us, "Do not let the *perfect* be the enemy of the good." That doesn't mean we don't strive for excellence. It means that we are action oriented and constantly looking for new opportunities and ways to improve.

4. Describe how the nominee has demonstrated leadership within the NASPE organization in support of NASPE's mission to share information on human resource issues so that members can better achieve their state's mission and business objectives. Include evidence of local or national acclaim in the field and influence on other states' personnel executives.

Upon becoming Secretary, Tom quickly realized the value of Kentucky's membership in NASPE. He knows that the connections and relationships that grow out of our participation truly benefit Kentucky. He is constantly looking for ways to collaborate with other states and learn from their experiences. He is also quick to share or help when needed. Tom is a member of NASPE's Executive Committee.

5. Describe any relevant state human resource management programs or initiatives that were successful because of the nominee's involvement.

Tom's vision, hard work, and leadership have directly led to the creation and success of the initiatives outlined above. His vision for the *MyPURPOSE* system as a comprehensive resource for employees only grows. The estimated savings from the implementation of this technology solution continues as state agencies with lengthy in-person academies are analyzing the courses that can be filmed and incorporated into custom online courses, thus saving thousands of dollars in hotel and food costs for employees to stay weeks away from their office. Similarly, his initiative and testimony securing legislative changes will benefit public employees and put Kentucky on the map as one of the most military friendly states.

April 28, 2019

Dear NASPE Leader:

It is my privilege to present Thomas Stephens, Esq., Secretary of the Personnel Cabinet for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, for NASPE's Rooney Award: Leadership in State Human Resource Management (Individual).

Perhaps unlike any other person, I know how good a job Secretary Stephens has done while in his current role because I held the same role more than 12 years ago, hired him to be my General Counsel and recommended him to the Governor for this role while advising the transition team for this Cabinet just before the start of the current Administration.

Secretary Stephens is a rare combination of able and earnest. He possesses a robust intellect, a broad comprehension of issues and is an indefatigable advocate for "doing the right thing". He has a unique combination of people skills and problem solving skills between which he toggles deftly depending on the needs of the moment.

Though not a perfect man, he is as honorable a public servant as I have known and I hold him in unflagging esteem because of it.

Moreover, he has been an effective leader of his Cabinet and the personnel functions it serves for our Commonwealth. To identify a short summary of the accomplishments of the Cabinet facilitated by his leadership, I commend to you the following:

- *Implementation of the state's first comprehensive talent management suite, MyPurpose System – including strategy and vision to impact how the Commonwealth attracts, recruits & retains talent*
- *Deferred Compensation System Board Member – Led the charge on successfully implementing legislation in 2019 authorizing auto enrollment in the official supplemental 401k & 457b retirement plans, also facilitating engagement with school systems, and collaborating with public employees outside of the traditional state government system*
- *Veterans Preference legislation to include spouses and widows(ers) of service members and modernize an outdated statute*
- *Kentucky Group Health Insurance Board – dependent eligibility audit, saving millions*
- *Member of the Kentucky Work Matters Task Force – Examined obstacles to employment for five populations, including people with disabilities, veterans, foster youth, individuals with criminal records, and individuals with substance use disorders, and proposed policy solutions to remove those barriers.*
- *Under leadership, the Cabinet created the first App for state employees*

- *Modernizing the state compensation system through implementation of a “locality” premium and “critical position” premium*
- *Implemented fair chance employment by removing criminal background check questions from the state application*
- *Instituted position descriptions for all employees, including unclassified/ non-merit positions*
- *Reinvigorated the Kentucky public employee mediation program, hosting the first group of the trainees in many years*
- *EEO Diversity & Leadership Conference – Under Secretary Stephens’ leadership, the Kentucky Personnel Cabinet tripled the size of the conference over the course of three years, resulting in the establishment of Kentucky’s largest and premier diversity and inclusion conference*
- *Kentucky Retirement Systems Board member*

For these, and many more reasons, I recommend, without hesitation or reservation, Secretary Thomas Stephens to you for your selection and recognition as this year's Rooney Award winner.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this skillful public servant.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Crall
Former Personnel Cabinet Secretary
Commonwealth of Kentucky