

HARTFORD BUSINESS JOURNAL

JUNE 17, 2002 • HARTFORD BUSINESS JOURNAL

State business registry program may be cut

Smart Start faces budget axe

By Laurie Ledgard

Last week the Smart Start program that helps to register new businesses with the state was scheduled for a Connecticut Quality Improvement Award.

But by the time Smart Start actually receives the award this October, the program may no longer exist.

Smart Start is slated to be cut from the next state budget, based on the latest proposal sent by lawmakers to Gov. John Rowland, said Lauren Kyle, spokeswoman for the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, which manages Smart Start for the state's Office of Policy & Management.

Kyle said Smart Start helps new business owners obtain all their licenses and registrations in one place, get help from business specialists in filling out all necessary forms, and write one check for everything. Smart Start then forwards all fees to the appropriate state agencies.

"It saves them the time of having to go from state office to state office," Kyle said. "And it guarantees some revenue."

"Connecticut is dedicated to improving its business climate by simplifying the registration and licensing process for new and expanding businesses," the Smart Start Web site notes.

Smart Start is part of the High Efficiency Licensing Program created in 1997 as a "one-stop shopping" point for licenses and information, and part of the governor's effort to streamline state government.

The other part of HELP — which also is threatened — is the Connecticut Licensing Info Center located on the Web at www.ct-clic.com. The site provides information for businesses

HELP budget for the last fiscal year was \$250,000 and its projected budget was \$250,000. The budget for Smart Start last year was \$200,000 and for next year it was scheduled to be

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SmartStart program funding restored

By Laurie Ledgard

It was mid-July and Beth Wallace, who has been executive director of the state's SmartStart business registry program since it was created

in 1997, was almost five months pregnant and faced losing her job.

Today, her program is saved and Wal-

lace is back at work. "At least for another year," she said.

The SmartStart program was slated for the budget axe but received a reprieve just in time for the start of its busiest season.

SmartStart is overseen by the Connecticut Economic Resource Center and was designed as a "one-stop-shopping" point for new businesses to pay for all licenses and ensure compliance with Connecticut business law.

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"If they are cut — and this might be premature — it would be a loss to the business community."

*— Secretary of the State
Susan Bysiewicz*

and consumers on all kinds of licensing needs, from fishing, to driving, to nursing to contracting.

OPM Secretary Marc S. Ryan confirmed the HELP initiative is on a list of potential budget reductions.

"I've instructed the folks in my agency to hold up contracting with HELP," Ryan said, because its future is uncertain.

According to CERC, the total