



City of Philadelphia

Commissioner of Labor Relations





The Position

The City of Philadelphia, a city with ambitious goals and an active labor landscape, is seeking its next Commissioner of Labor Relations (Commissioner). The Commissioner serves as the City of Philadelphia's principal labor relations executive and the primary point of contact for the City's labor community, guiding labor policy, managing negotiations and grievance resolution with the City's internal bargaining units, and leading the department's worker protection and enforcement functions. The ideal candidate is a seasoned labor relations professional who pairs deep technical expertise with the leadership presence and collaborative instincts to build trust across a complex, multi-stakeholder environment. This is a compelling opportunity for a leader who understands that strong labor relations are not just an administrative function, but a foundation for how a city delivers on its promises to its workforce and its residents.

The Commissioner is a key member of the City's executive leadership, reports to the Chief Administrative Officer, and advises the Mayor's office on labor strategy, policy development, and emerging employment issues. Internally, the Commissioner serves as the City's chief technical expert and principal advisor to department heads and senior leadership on all labor-related matters. Externally, the Commissioner engages unions, worker advocacy organizations, employers, and community stakeholders – building the relationships and credibility that allow the department to fulfill its mission as both a partner and an enforcer.

The next Commissioner will join a department with experienced, committed staff and a clearly defined mission – and will be expected to bring both strategic clarity and steady hands to a role that sits at the intersection of City management, union relationships, and community accountability.

The Department of Labor builds partnerships between City management and the labor organizations representing City employees, while also investigating and enforcing critical worker rights across Philadelphia's broader economy. The Commissioner plans, organizes, and directs the full scope of the department's work – from collective bargaining and grievance resolution to unfair labor practice responses, from ensuring City contractors meet prevailing and living wage requirements to administering and enforcing the City's worker protection laws, including paid sick leave, wage theft prevention, and fair workweek standards.

The Commissioner provides oversight to Deputy Commissioners managing the department's three primary offices – the Office of Employee and Labor Relations, the Office of Labor Standards, and the Office of Worker Protections – as well as the Living Wage Working Group. The Commissioner also works in close coordination with a Deputy City Solicitor embedded within the department, reflecting the legal complexity and consequence of this portfolio.

Priorities

- Build and sustain strong labor relationships. The Commissioner will serve as the City's primary relationship builder across its labor community – fostering open communication, mutual respect, and collaborative problem-solving with union leadership, bargaining units, and worker advocacy partners citywide.
- Lead contract negotiations with skill and purpose. Philadelphia's active bargaining environment offers the incoming Commissioner an immediate opportunity to shape meaningful agreements, balancing fiscal responsibilities with a genuine commitment to fair outcomes for its workforce.
- Implement and enforce emerging worker protection legislation. Philadelphia continues to strengthen its worker protection framework. The Commissioner will lead the charge in translating new and evolving legislation into practical, accessible programs that educate employers, empower workers, and deliver measurable community impact.
- Develop and invest in a talented team. The Commissioner will have a real opportunity to shape the department's leadership structure, grow staff capacity, and build a culture where employees are supported, challenged, and set up to do their best work.

The Successful Candidate

The next Commissioner of Labor is a confident, emotionally intelligent leader who brings the technical authority and human presence to lead one of Philadelphia's most consequential departments. This work is high-stakes, politically complex, and often emotionally taxing – and the ideal candidate does not just manage through that reality but thrives in it. They bring a steady hand, sound judgment, and an ability to hold firm under pressure while remaining genuinely open, fair, and approachable to the people they serve.

A defining trait of the successful candidate is the ability to operate with autonomy. This Commissioner will not wait to be told what to do. They will take a high-level vision from the Mayor's office and develop the strategies, tools, and resources needed to bring it to life, building a clear, accountable plan and driving execution without requiring constant direction or oversight. Flexibility and resilience are not just preferred qualities here; they are requirements. Priorities shift, legislation evolves, and the labor environment is never static. The next Commissioner will navigate all of it without losing focus on what matters most.

Building trust is both the first task and the ongoing work of this role. The ideal candidate arrives with a demonstrated track record of earning credibility across diverse and sometimes adversarial stakeholders – union leaders, City management, frontline workers, elected officials, and community partners. They understand that trust is built through consistency, transparency, and follow-through, and they hold themselves to that standard before expecting it from others. Equally important is the ability to manage and de-escalate workplace conflict with skill and composure – reducing friction, preserving relationships, and creating the conditions that reduce employee turnover over time.

The next Commissioner is an exceptional communicator who can command a room during high-stakes negotiations, speak plainly to frontline workers about their rights, and make a compelling case to City leadership for the resources needed to succeed. Advocacy is a core skill here – this Commissioner understands how to build a persuasive argument, read the room, and influence policy and budget outcomes without overstepping their role. They translate the Mayor's vision into operational reality, building accountability structures and success metrics that make that vision measurable and achievable.



The successful candidate brings deep, practiced expertise in labor and employment law. Fluency with collective bargaining, including negotiating agreements, managing grievance processes, repairing strained union relationships, and meeting the deadlines and obligations embedded in existing contracts is non-negotiable. Equally important is a sophisticated understanding of worker protection law, including paid sick leave, wage theft prevention, fair workweek standards, and the evolving legislative landscape that the department is responsible for implementing and enforcing. Familiarity with Pennsylvania public sector labor law, the Labor Relations Act, and the Davis-Bacon Act will be meaningful advantages.

The Commissioner brings strong management instincts to a team of 61 employees and four direct reports – the Chief of Staff, and the supervisors leading Worker Protections, Employee and Labor Relations, and Labor Standards. They delegate thoughtfully, develop their people, and build a culture of accountability and professional growth within the department. They are a model of integrity in their own conduct, handling sensitive complaints and high-profile matters with discretion and fairness and they set the tone for how the entire department shows up for the City and the community it serves.



Qualifications

Minimum qualifications include any combination of education and experience equivalent to a bachelor's degree in labor relations, human resources management, public administration, business administration, or a closely related field, and ten years of progressively responsible experience in labor relations, with at least five years in a senior leadership or deputy director role. Proven experience negotiating high-stakes contracts, managing worker protection obligations, and administering Equal Employment Opportunity policies and regulations – including collective bargaining agreements and grievance processes – in a unionized environment is required.

Preferred qualifications include an advanced degree in a related field. Candidates with direct experience in a large public sector or municipal labor environment, with demonstrated success navigating complex multi-union relationships and a portfolio that spans both internal labor relations and external worker protection or enforcement functions, are strongly preferred.

The successful candidate must establish residency within the City of Philadelphia within six months of hire. The City offers relocation assistance up to a certain amount.

The City of Philadelphia is most interested in finding the best candidate for the job, and that candidate may come from a less traditional background. If you are passionate about this work and meet many of the key criteria, we encourage you to apply.



Inside the Department of Labor

The City of Philadelphia operates under a strong mayor-council form of government, established by the Home Rule Charter, which affords the City significant autonomy from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia also operates under a consolidated city-county governance structure, meaning the City and Philadelphia County are governed by the same body. The Mayor serves as chief executive, setting priorities and driving policy on behalf of more than 1.5 million residents. City Council functions as the legislative branch, shaping policy, passing laws, and approving the City's operating budget. Philadelphia's government also includes independently elected officials – among them the City Controller, City Commissioners, and District Attorney – as well as numerous boards and commissions providing expertise, oversight, and community input. The Commissioner reports directly to the Mayor's office and serves as the City's primary labor relations authority across both internal workforce matters and external worker protection obligations.

The Department of Labor is organized into three offices and one working group. The Office of Employee and Labor Relations handles collective bargaining negotiations, union contract implementation, grievance resolution, unfair labor practice charges, and investigations of sexual harassment and discrimination complaints from City employees, applicants, former employees, and members of the public. The Office of Labor Standards ensures that employers with City contracts pay prevailing wages, resolves minimum-wage waiver requests, and administers living wage compliance programs. The Office of Worker Protections administers and enforces the City's worker protection laws, including paid sick leave, wage theft prevention, and fair workweek standards – conducting outreach, education, and enforcement across Philadelphia's private employer community. The Living Wage Working Group addresses the intersection of City contracting and wage equity, supporting the department's broader mission of advancing fair compensation practices citywide.

The Department's work has direct consequences for tens of thousands of employees – both within City government and across private employers doing business with the City – and serves as a critical accountability mechanism for Philadelphia's commitments to workforce equity and worker dignity.

The Department of Labor:

- Handles negotiations between City unions and City management.
- Responds to unfair labor practice charges filed against the City.
- Investigates complaints of sexual harassment and discrimination from any City employees, applicants, former employees, or members of the public.
- Represents the City in union disputes.
- Makes sure employers with City contracts pay prevailing wages.
- Resolves minimum-wage waiver requests.
- Administers and enforces the City's worker protection laws.



The Community

Located in southeastern Pennsylvania along the Delaware River, Philadelphia is the state's largest city and the sixth most populous in the United States, home to more than 1.5 million residents. Situated within easy reach of both New York City and Washington, D.C., Philadelphia offers the culture, infrastructure, and opportunity of a major metropolitan center alongside a cost of living and urban character that remain distinctly its own. The original brochure puts it simply: Philadelphia combines relative affordability with world-class offerings – without the price tag of other major East Coast cities.

Philadelphia's momentum is recognized nationally. USA Today voted Philadelphia "Most Walkable City" for the third consecutive year. Mayor Cherelle L. Parker has set a clear vision for the city's future – making Philadelphia the safest, cleanest, and greenest big city in the nation, with economic opportunity for all – and the City's investments in housing, public safety, workforce development, and sustainability are translating that ambition into measurable progress.



Compensation and Benefits

The expected hiring range is \$177,898-\$222,372, depending on qualifications, with an excellent benefits package. Learn more about our options and employee-based benefits [here](#).

Benefits offered include the following:

- Medical Benefits: Medical, Prescription, Dental, and Vision
- Additional Benefits: Backup Care, FSA, Pet Insurance, and a host of voluntary benefits
- Vacation Leave: 15 Days
- Administrative (Personal) Leave: 5 days
- Sick Leave: 15 Days
- Paid Holidays: 13 per calendar year
- Retirement: Defined pension contribution plan
- City vehicle and premium parking placard available



How to Apply

Applications will be accepted electronically by Raftelis at raftelis.com. Applicants complete a brief online form and are prompted to provide a cover letter and resume. The position will be open until filled.



Questions

Please direct questions to Pamela Wideman at pwideman@raftelis.com and Kelsey Batt at kbatt@raftelis.com.

Trusted advisors transforming communities

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