

State economic-development chief defends Excelsior

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Empire State Development Corp. Chairman Dennis Mullen said the Excelsior Jobs Program is a worthy, stronger successor to the often maligned Empire Zone program.

Business groups have expressed skepticism that the program would do much to help companies stimulate job growth when it only provides \$250 million in tax credits and incentives. Empire Zone set aside \$600 million in credits and incentives.

They are also concerned that by targeting specific fields such as biotechnology, financial services and manufacturing, the program is skipping over a wide swath of companies.

Others feel the state is just too difficult to do business in.

“On the one hand, they’re looking right now at reducing some of the benefits of a program that is designed to attract and retain employers,” Chris Wiest, vice president of public policy for the Rochester Business Alliance told Gannett Albany Bureau reporter Jon Campbell. “On the other hand, the state is considering and is implementing increases in taxes and fees on business. That really is a recipe for disaster for job creation.”

Gov. David Paterson proposed the program as a replacement to Empire zones, which have been criticized for a lack of oversight and sufficient job creation. Paterson was expected to submit the program to the Legislature this week, but proposal remains in negotiation.

Mullen said the Excelsior program makes sense. He said the program rewards businesses that are going to remain in New York.

“What we haven’t targeted and what we’ve cut out are all encompassing businesses that are anchored here anyway,” Mullen said. “The other program rewarded and had the ability to reward businesses that are going to be here. That prioritization does not include what we feel are businesses. We’ve designed these programs based on other states’ best practices.”