

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1555

As of March 17, 2009

Title: An act relating to the recommendations of the joint legislative task force on the underground economy in the construction industry.

Brief Description: Addressing the recommendations of the joint legislative task force on the underground economy in the construction industry.

Sponsors: House Committee on Commerce & Labor (originally sponsored by Representatives Conway, Chase, Green, Dickerson, Rolfes, Goodman, Campbell, Morrell, Cody, Simpson, Ormsby, Van De Wege, Seaquist, Appleton, Miloscia, Hunt, Blake, Williams, Hudgins, Kenney, Sullivan, Priest, Eddy and Wood).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/05/09, 95-1.

Committee Activity: Labor, Commerce & Consumer Protection: 3/17/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR, COMMERCE & CONSUMER PROTECTION

Staff: Kathleen Buchli (786-7488)

Background: In 2007 the Legislature created the Joint Legislative Task Force on the Underground Economy in the Construction Industry (Task Force). The Task Force was directed to formulate a state policy to establish cohesion and transparency between state agencies to increase oversight and regulation of the underground economy practices in the construction industry. During the 2007 interim, the Task Force developed findings and recommendations and forwarded them to the Legislature. Many of these findings and recommendations were embodied in bills enacted during the 2008 Legislative Session. The Task Force's term was extended for an additional year and the Task Force was required to submit a final report to the Legislature by December 31, 2008.

In its final report, the Task Force issued a number of recommendations, including recommendations relating to contractor registration; education and outreach activities; defining the term independent contractor for prevailing wage purposes; unemployment insurance recordkeeping; establishing an interagency advisory committee; and benchmarks and measures.

Summary of Bill: A contractor must maintain, and have available for inspection by the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I), a list of all direct subcontractors and a copy of

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their certificate of registration. Before issuing a business license to a person required to be registered as a contractor, a city, town, or county must verify that the person is registered. The Department of Licensing must conduct the verification for cities that participate in the Master License System.

L&I and the Employment Security Department (ESD) have a priority lien on retainage on public works projects following the Department of Revenue (DOR). L&I must conduct education and outreach to employers on workers' compensation requirements and premium responsibilities, including independent contractor issues. L&I must work with new employers on an individual basis and establish mass education campaigns.

A penalty is created for employers who fail to keep and preserve unemployment insurance records. The penalty may not exceed \$250 or 200 percent of the quarterly tax for each offense, whichever is greater.

An interagency underground economy advisory committee (committee) is created to conduct a continuing study of the underground economy. The committee is composed of: one representative each from L&I, ESD, and DOR; one representative of cities and one representative of counties; and three representatives each of business and labor, appointed by the Director of L&I. The committee must submit reports to the appropriate committees of the Legislature annually beginning December 1, 2010.

L&I, ESD, and DOR must annually report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1 on the effectiveness of efforts implemented since July 1, 2008, to address the underground economy. The agencies must use benchmarks and measures established by the Washington Institute for Public Policy, and other measures it determines appropriate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed, except for section 13 which takes effect October 1, 2009.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The requirements for cities could be phased in. The underground economy must be addressed on the local level, but cities could be given time to update their computer systems. It is important to retain the ongoing advisory committee. The committee would expand its activities beyond the construction industry to address other elements of the underground economy. The annual reporting requirements should remain in the bill and the benchmarking activities should continue. The education and outreach requirements should remain in the bill as well as the reporting and benchmarking section.

OTHER: The requirements for the cities should be permissive. Some cities are not set up to meet the duties set up by the bill and would have to overhaul their computer systems to come into compliance. The additional employees estimated in the fiscal note are to fulfill the

education and outreach requirements, the advisory committee, and to assist with the retainage provisions.

Persons Testifying: PRO: David Johnson, Washington State Building Trades; Rick Slunaker, Associated General Contractors; John Littel, Pacific NW Regional Council of Carpenters.

OTHER: Victoria Lincoln, Association of Washington Cities; Carl Hammersburg, L&I; Art Wang, ESD.