

REGULATORY FAIRNESS ACT

The Regulatory Fairness Act, chapter 19.85 RCW, was enacted in 1982 to minimize the impact of state regulations on small business. Amended in 1994, the act requires a small business economic impact analysis of proposed rules that impose more than a minor cost on twenty percent of the businesses in all industries, or ten percent of the businesses in any one industry. The Regulatory Fairness Act defines industry as businesses within a four digit SIC classification, and for the purpose of this act, small business is defined by RCW 19.85.020 as “any business entity, including a sole proprietorship, corporation, partnership, or other legal entity, that is owned and operated independently from all other businesses, that has the purpose of making a profit, and that has fifty or fewer employees.”

Small Business Economic Impact Statements (SBEIS)

A small business economic impact statement (SBEIS) must be prepared by state agencies when a proposed rule meets the above criteria. Chapter 19.85 RCW requires the Washington State Business Assistance Center (BAC) to develop guidelines for agencies to use in determining whether the impact of a rule is more than minor and to provide technical assistance to agencies in developing an SBEIS. All permanent rules adopted under the Administrative Procedure Act, chapter 34.05 RCW, must be reviewed to determine if the requirements of the Regulatory Fairness Act apply; if an SBEIS is required it must be completed before permanent rules are filed with the office of the code reviser.

Mitigation

In addition to completing the economic impact analysis for proposed rules, state agencies must take reasonable, legal, and feasible steps to reduce or mitigate the impact of rules on small businesses when there is a disproportionate impact on small versus large business. State agencies are encouraged to reduce the economic impact of rules on small businesses when possible and when such steps are in keeping with the stated intent of the statute(s) being implemented by proposed rules. Since 1994, small business economic impact statements must contain a list of the mitigation steps taken, or reasonable justification for not taking steps to reduce the impact of rules on small businesses.

When is an SBEIS Required?

When:

The proposed rule has more than a minor (as defined by the BAC) economic impact on businesses in more than twenty percent of all industries or more than ten percent of any one industry.

When is an SBEIS Not Required?

When:

The rule is proposed only to comply or conform with a federal law or regulation, and the state has no discretion in how the rule is implemented;

There is less than minor economic impact on business;

The rule REDUCES costs to business (although an SBEIS may be a useful tool for demonstrating this reduced impact);

The rule is adopted as an emergency rule, although an SBEIS may be required when an emergency rule is proposed for adoption as a permanent rule; or

The rule is pure restatement of state statute.