

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5502

As Passed Senate, March 15, 1999

Title: An act relating to a salary survey report by the marine employees' commission.

Brief Description: Reporting the salary survey of ferry employees.

Sponsors: Senator Haugen; by request of Marine Employees' Commission.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/18/99, 2/23/99 [DP].
Passed Senate, 3/15/99, 44-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Gardner, Vice Chair; Goings, Vice Chair; Benton, Costa, Eide, Horn, Johnson, Morton, Patterson, Prentice, Sheahan, T. Sheldon and Shin.

Staff: Reema Shawa (786-7301)

Background: Under current law, the Marine Employees Commission (MEC) is required to conduct a biennial salary survey which collects wage and benefit information from both private and public ferry systems and shipyards along the West Coast, Alaska, and British Columbia. Participation by private employers is purely voluntary, with some or all of the participants requesting that their responses be kept confidential.

The purpose of the salary survey is to compare Washington State Ferry System employee wages, hours, employee benefits, and conditions of employment with those of other comparable ferry systems. This survey allows the Washington State Ferry system and the 13 labor unions representing state ferry employees to obtain prevailing wage and benefit conditions prior to contract negotiations that take place every two years.

The results of the survey are published in a final report, which communicates the findings as a composite average of the data collected, as opposed to identifying the specific, raw data from each participant. This final report is made public, but the actual raw data from each employer is kept confidential. However, if anyone should request a copy of the raw data, the MEC must release the information, per current public disclosure laws. Because many of the private participants request confidentiality, this fact alone may cause them to stop participating in the survey. Should the private participants drop out, the survey would then only be a query of public owned operations, and thus the value and validity of the results would be significantly decreased when being used as a comparative, bench marking tool in contract negotiations.

Summary of Bill: Provisions are established which limit the MEC to publishing a report on the survey results only. The salary and benefit information collected from private

employers that identifies a specific employer with the salary and employee benefit rates which that employer pays to its employees is not subject to public disclosure under Chapter 42.17 RCW.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This bill will assist the MEC in conducting their biannual salary survey. It will also ensure active participation by private employers by exempting their information from public disclosure requirements.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Janis Lien, Marine Employees' Commission; Joe Daniels, Puget Sound District Council.

House Amendment(s): The State Auditor's Office is established as the entity authorized to review all the raw data collected in the Marine Employees Commission salary survey, including the data provided by private employers. This review by the Auditor's Office would be prompted only after receiving a petition from a person or entity who believes that the salary survey results are inaccurate. However, the Auditor's Office is prohibited from disclosing the salary survey data to any other person or entity, except by court order.