

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 6630

As Passed Senate, February 18, 2002

Title: An act relating to certification of electricians.

Brief Description: Providing for certification as a master electrician.

Sponsors: Senators Prentice, Honeyford, Rasmussen and Sheahan.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Labor, Commerce & Financial Institutions: 2/4/02, 2/5/02 [DP, DNP].

Passed Senate: 2/18/02, 45-3.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR, COMMERCE & FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fairley, Gardner, Hochstatter, Honeyford, Rasmussen, West and Winsley.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Keiser, Vice Chair.

Staff: Elizabeth Mitchell (786-7430)

Background: The Department of Labor and Industries currently certifies journeyman and specialty electricians, electrical trainees, electrical contractors and administrators. In order to obtain an electrical contractor license, a business must designate a certified administrator.

The ratio of certified to noncertified journeyman electricians on a job site must not exceed 1:2. If workers are part of a community college or vocational program, the ratio must not exceed 1:4. The ratio of certified to noncertified specialty electricians on a job site must not exceed 1:2 in all cases. Certified electricians supervising trainees must be on the job site for a minimum of 75 percent of each work day.

In order to become a specialty electrician, a person must complete two years of supervised work experience regardless of his/her educational background. There is concern that this work requirement is too high for people who have obtained electrical degrees from community or vocational colleges.

Summary of Bill: New certifications for master journeyman and master specialty electricians are created. In order to take the examination to become a master journeyman or specialty electrician, a person must be certified for four or two years, respectively. If an applicant has been certified for a requisite amount of time before July 2005, that person may apply to become a master electrician without taking an examination. Elements of the master electrician examination are specified.

To obtain a general or specialty contractor license, an applicant can designate a certified master electrician instead of a certified administrator. A contractor must notify the department within ten days if a master electrician's or administrator's relationship with contractor terminates. Administrator's certificates are valid for three instead of two years, and may be renewed without examination if the certificate holder completes an annual eight hour continuing education course. A person who holds more than one administrator's certificate is only required to pay a fee for one certificate. The department must set fees for administrative certificates and renewals by rule. The fees must cover, but not exceed, the costs of issuing certificates and enforcing electrician certification requirements.

Electrical training certificates are reviewed once every two years instead of once every year. Master electricians, in addition to other electricians, can supervise trainees. The ratio of certified to noncertified specialty electricians on a job site is extended to 1:4 if the trainees are part of a vocational or community college program. When trainees are part of a vocational or community college program, certified electricians must be on the job site for 100 percent of the work day instead of 75 percent.

Work requirements for journeyman and specialty electrician certification are measured by hours instead of years. Specialty electricians who have less than 4000 hours of work experience cannot credit their work hours toward qualifying to become a journeyman electrician.

"Two year electrical programs" are defined as consisting of at least 3000 hours of instruction, at least 2400 of which must be technical electrical instruction.

If an applicant for a specialty electrician certificate has completed a two-year community college or vocational school program, the applicant can substitute up to one year of school experience for one year of work experience. In addition, these individuals can work without supervision during the last six months of meeting their work experience requirements. The effect of these changes is that a person who completes a two-year community college/vocational school program can apply for certification after six months, not two years, of supervised work experience, and six months of unsupervised work experience. Persons enrolled in electrical school programs of less than two years can substitute up to half of the required work experience with school experience.

Applicants for the residential, pump and irrigation, sign, limited energy, or nonresidential maintenance specialties must have 4000 hours of supervised work experience. Applicants for all other specialties must have 2000 hours of work experience. The first 90 hours of experience for these specialties, or a longer period of time if set by rule by the department, must be fully supervised. After this initial full supervision period, a person may take the specialty examination. If the person passed the examination, the person may work unsupervised for the balance of the 2000 hours required for certification.

The department can revoke a certificate of competency if a person endangers the public or property, and can deny an application for up to two years if a person's certificate has been previously revoked.

The certified electrical specialty pertaining to "domestic appliances" is eliminated. The definition of "equipment" does not include plug-in appliances or equipment determined by rule by the department.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This bill is a result of the work of a task force that met throughout the interim. This bill requires less supervised work experience in order to be certified as a specialty electrician if people are graduates of community college or vocational programs; the current requirement of two years of supervised work is too long for these people. The bill allows the department to create new specialties to cover appliance repair.

Testimony Against: Classroom time should not be substituted for on the job experience. The rulemaking abilities granted to the department are too broad. The ratio of certified to noncertified students is too lenient.

Testified: PRO: Ron Fuller, Patrick Woods, L&I; Paul Baeder, Renton Technical College; Gary Smith, Independent Business Assn.; Mark Johnson, NFIB; Melissa Johnson, WA State Hotel and Lodging Assn.; Doug Neyhart, AASK (RHA); Rod Kaufman; CON: Mike Grunwald, WA Assn. of Electrical Workers/WA Building Trades; Mike Hendrix, IBEWLU #46; William Bowsfir, PSEJATL; Janet Lewis, IBEW.