

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2657

As Reported By House Committee On:
Commerce & Labor

Title: An act relating to public employees' collective bargaining.

Brief Description: Changing the definition of "uniformed personnel" for public employees' collective bargaining.

Sponsors: Representatives G. Fisher, Tate, King, Conway, Orr, Forner, Campbell, Brough, Mielke, Van Luven and Talcott.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Commerce & Labor, February 2, 1994, DPA.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Heavey, Chair; G. Cole, Vice Chair; Chandler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Conway; King; Springer and Veloria.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Lisk, Ranking Minority Member; and Horn.

Staff: Jim Kelley (786-7166).

Background: Employees of cities, counties and other political subdivisions of the state bargain their wages and working conditions under the Public Employees' Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA). For uniformed personnel, the act recognizes the public policy against strikes as a means of settling labor disputes. To resolve disputes involving these uniformed personnel, the PECBA requires binding arbitration if negotiations for a contract reach impasse and cannot be resolved through mediation.

Legislation enacted during the 1993 legislative session extended the binding interest arbitration provisions of the PECBA for uniformed personnel to several categories of public employees, including:

- (1) employees of port districts performing fire fighting duties if the port district is in a county with a population of 1 million or more; and

(2) advanced life support technicians who are employed by public hospital districts.

Other 1993 amendments to the same statute created technical conflicts in the code. The code reviser elected not to merge the conflicting statutes.

Summary of Amended Bill: Employees of a port district in a county with a population of 100,000 or more whose duties include crash-fire rescue or other fire fighting duties and emergency medical technicians are covered by the binding interest arbitration provisions of the Public Employees' Collective Bargaining Act for uniformed personnel.

The conflicting statutes enacted in 1993 are merged.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The amended bill lowers the population threshold for counties in which port district fire fighters are classified as uniformed personnel from 1,000,000 to 100,000. The original bill completely eliminates the population threshold.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed, except for sections 3 and 4 of the bill, which take effect July 1, 1995.

Testimony For: All professional firefighters in every port district except Bellingham are covered by the binding interest arbitration provisions. These employees are first and foremost firefighters. An oversight last year excluded Emergency Medical Technicians from the coverage of the law. Since striking is rarely, if ever, a viable option, arbitration is necessary for these emergency personnel.

Testimony Against: This bill includes personnel from two ports: Bellingham and Moses Lake. Eighty-five percent of the activities of these personnel at the port of Moses Lake do not involve fire fighting activities. This bill would create an inappropriate split in the bargaining unit at Moses Lake. Interest arbitration is costly.

Witnesses: (In favor of original bill) Ken Snider, Washington State Council of Firefighters. (Opposed to original bill) Scott Taylor, Washington Public Ports Association; Reed Gillig, Port of Bellingham; and Dave Bailey, Port of Moses Lake.