

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SHB 2357

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As Passed Senate - Amended, March 6, 2024

**Title:** An act relating to establishment of a state patrol longevity bonus.

**Brief Description:** Establishing a state patrol longevity bonus.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives Fey, Barkis, Hutchins, Robertson, Leavitt, Schmidt, Shavers, Nance, Bronoske, Paul, Timmons and Caldier).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/12/24, 97-0.

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 2/20/24, 2/26/24 [DPA].

**Floor Activity:** Passed Senate - Amended: 3/1/24, 48-0; 3/6/24, 47-0.

### Brief Summary of Bill (As Amended by Senate)

- Establishes the Washington State Patrol (WSP) longevity bonus program with a bonus of \$15,000 paid to employees achieving 26 or more years of service, which will be paid in four quarterly installments.
- Expires the longevity bonus program on June 30, 2029.
- Requires quarterly reporting of the average filled trooper positions compared to the total authorized number of positions.
- Excludes the bonus from the calculation of salary for determining pension benefits.
- Requires the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee to conduct a performance review of the WSP longevity bonus pilot program by November 1, 2028.

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Lias, Chair; Lovick, Vice Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; King, Ranking Member; Holy, Assistant Ranking Member; Cleveland, Fortunato, Hansen, Hawkins, Kauffman, Lovelett, MacEwen, Nobles, Padden, Valdez, Wilson, C. and Wilson, J..

**Staff:** Bryon Moore (786-7726)

**Background:** The Washington State Patrol (WSP) is responsible for traffic law enforcement, collision investigation, criminal interdiction, terrorism prevention, and motorist assistance on the interstate and state highway systems. Commissioned staff include a field force of 683 trooper positions and an estimated 250 commissioned non-field force positions supported by the transportation budget. As of November 2023 vacancy rates are estimated at about 23 percent.

The Washington State Patrol Retirement System (WSPRS) is the retirement plan available to commissioned WSP employees. Members can retire at age 55 with five years of service or at any age with 25 years of service. Members are subject to mandatory retirement at age 65 unless they are serving as the chief. In 2024, 122 commissioned staff will be eligible for retirement.

Compensation and personnel matters for troopers, sergeants, lieutenants, and captains are collectively bargained between their exclusive bargaining representatives and the state.

**Summary of Amended Bill:** Beginning on July 1, 2024, WSP is directed to issue \$15,000 annual longevity bonuses to eligible employees completing 26 or more years of service, on the employee's anniversary date of state employment. The bonus must be paid in four equal quarterly payments.

The longevity bonus program expires on June 30, 2029.

The benefits provided by the state patrol longevity bonus pilot program are not provided to employees as a matter of contractual right. The Legislature retains the right to alter or abolish these benefits at any time.

Within the WSPRS authorizing statutes, the definition of salary is amended to exclude earnings from the longevity bonus.

Beginning July 14, 2024, the WSP must submit a quarterly report showing the average filled positions in field force trooper positions in comparison to the 683 total authorized field force trooper positions. The quarterly reports must be submitted to the Office of Financial Management and the transportation committees of the Legislature. The authorized field force trooper level may be adjusted in the omnibus transportation appropriations act.

By November 1, 2028, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee must conduct a performance review of the WSP longevity bonus program. The performance review must evaluate, at minimum:

- the impact on retention of senior commissioned staff at the WSP;
- the change in vacancies in each of the commissioned staff categories over time;
- an evaluation of optimal commissioned staffing levels at the WSP, including comparisons to other states' field force staffing levels;
- a description of other factors that may be impacting retention and vacancy rates; and
- recommendations for addressing WSP staffing levels, which must include whether to continue the WSP longevity bonus program.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Substitute House Bill:** *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: We have serious problems on our highways with people behaving poorly and putting others at risk. Due to the vacancies in the State Patrol ranks, we do not have the troopers to adequately address this problem. This is a temporary policy, but it builds off of previous efforts. There have been past efforts to improve the competitiveness of State Patrol salaries compared to local governments designed to improve retention. Recently, the state took a variety of actions including bonuses for cadet hires, establishing lateral hiring bonuses, and providing retention bonuses for current commissioned staff. However, this still hasn't solved the problem and we still have a long way to go. With the high number of retirement eligible staff, if not addressed, additional turnover could make the problem worse. Recruitment and retention is an on-going challenge. Retention of senior staff is another area worthy of focus. This new bonus will allow us to retain staff that mentor, train, and instill the traditions of the State Patrol in the younger troopers.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Jake Fey, Prime Sponsor; Jason Linn, Washington State Patrol Lieutenants and Captains Association (WSPLCA); Spike Unruh, Washington State Patrol Troopers Association.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.