

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1550

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, April 4, 2003

Title: An act relating to ensuring that regulatory information and assistance is available to Washington citizens through an office of regulatory assistance.

Brief Description: Revising the duties of and renaming the office of permit assistance.

Sponsors: House Committee on State Government (originally sponsored by Representatives Linville, Armstrong, Haigh, Buck, Schual-Berke, McDermott and Conway).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 3/26/03, 4/4/03 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Stevens, Vice Chair; Kastama and Reardon.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: The Permit Assistance Center (PAC) was created in 1995 in the Department of Ecology (DOE) to provide the public with information regarding environmental permitting laws and assistance to businesses and public agencies in complying with these laws.

Statutory provisions for the PAC were subject to a sunset review. Although the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee prepared a sunset review recommending reauthorization, the PAC's statutory provisions expired on June 30, 1999. An appropriation in the 1999-2001 budget continued funding for the PAC operations, and it continues to operate within the DOE.

In 2002, legislation was enacted to transfer the powers, duties, and functions of the DOE's Permit Assistance Center to a new Office of Permit Assistance (OPA) within the Office of Financial Management. OPA provides information services and, upon request, facilitates permitting projects for a cost, or at OPA expense if it is determined it is in the public interest to do so. In addition to these responsibilities, OPA:

- develops informal processes for dispute resolution between agencies and project applicants;
- conducts customer surveys to evaluate its effectiveness;
- reviews initiatives developed by the Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee to determine if any would be beneficial if implemented for other projects;
- prioritizes expenditures of general fund money to provide services to small project applicants; and

- provides biennial reports to the Legislature on OPA performance, on any identified statutory or regulatory conflicts related to authorities and roles of permit agencies, and on use of outside independent consultants in the coordinated permit process.

OPA's powers and duties terminate June 30, 2007.

Summary of Bill: OPA is renamed the Office of Regulatory Assistance (ORA). A director for the ORA is hired no later than June 1, 2003. ORA coordinates with state agencies to develop an office web site that is linked through the Office of the Governor's web site. The web site contains information about regulatory requirements for businesses and citizens of Washington. The web site also provides information or links to information on the following:

- federal, state, and local rule-making processes and permit requirements applicable to Washington businesses and citizens;
- federal, state, and local licenses, permits, and approvals necessary to start and operate a business or develop real property in Washington;
- state and local building codes;
- federal, state, and local economic development programs available to businesses in Washington; and
- state and local agencies regulating or providing assistance to citizens and businesses operating a business or developing real property in Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: The office is a front door on a confusing regulatory system. It helps people find out who to call about and how to get through the regulatory maze. The degree of tailoring and customizing that can be done to the website to make it user-friendly depends on the financial commitment made to it. Once in place, it should save money by allowing people to do more for themselves.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: L. Mike Freeman, Citizen Advocate (concerns); Carol Jolly, Governor's Office (pro); Scott Boetcher, Department of Ecology (pro).