

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1529

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Local Government

**Title:** An act relating to per diem rates for port district officers and employees.

**Brief Description:** Modifying per diem rates for port district officers and employees.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Tharinger, Fey, Takko, Haler, Reykdal, Walsh, Tarleton and Moscoso.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Local Government: 2/3/15, 2/17/15 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Removes the \$25 threshold amount as the maximum per diem payment that may be paid to port district employees and officials for travel and business expenses when travel requires overnight lodging.
- Replaces the statutory per diem payment dollar threshold with the United States General Services Administration's per diem rates.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Takko, Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Fitzgibbon, McBride and Peterson.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Taylor, Ranking Minority Member; Griffey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin and Pike.

**Staff:** Michaela Murdock (786-7289).

**Background:**

Ports districts (districts) are special purpose districts established for purposes related to: harbor improvements; rail, motor vehicle, water, or air transfer and terminal facilities, or any

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combination of such transfer and terminal facilities; and other commercial transportation, transfer, handling, storage and terminal facilities; and industrial improvements.

Powers of a district are exercised through a port commission (commission) consisting of three or five members, as permitted by statute. The commission may by resolution: create and fill employment positions with the district; fix wages, salaries, and bonds; pay costs and assessments involved in securing or arranging to secure employees; and establish employee benefits, including holiday pay, vacations or vacation pay, retirement and pension benefits, and medical, surgical, hospital care, life, accident, or health disability insurance.

#### Reimbursement of Expenses - Port District Employees.

District employees, officers, and commissioners, when engaged in official business of the district, are entitled to receive their necessary and reasonable travel and business expenses incurred on behalf of the district. Reimbursement of expenses may be granted when expenses are submitted on a voucher with appropriate evidence of payment by the employee or official.

Each district must adopt, and periodically amend, a resolution establishing the basic rules and regulations governing the method and amount of reimbursement payable to district employees and officials. The resolution must establish procedures for approving expenses; the method of authorizing the direct purchase of transportation; the voucher form; and requirements for the use of credit cards issued in the name of the district.

District regulations may provide for payment of per diem, in lieu of actual expenses, when travel requires overnight lodging. In all cases, the per diem payment may not exceed \$25 per day. The statutory dollar threshold of \$25 for per diem payments was established in 1965, and has not been changed since that time.

#### United States General Services Administration.

The United States General Services Administration (GSA) is a federal agency, established in 1949 to streamline the administrative work of the federal government. The GSA provides workspace to federal civilian workers, oversees the preservation of historic buildings, and facilitates the federal government's purchase of goods and services from commercial vendors.

The GSA establishes per diem rates for destinations within the continental United States for federal employees. A per diem allowance is a daily payment instead of reimbursement for actual expenses for lodging, meals, and related incidental expenses. The per diem allowance is separate from transportation expenses and other miscellaneous expenses. The per diem rates are adjusted by the GSA each year and vary by state and region.

Under the rates established by the GSA for 2015, the standard rates for Washington are \$83 for lodging and \$46 for meals and incidental expenses. However, for specified locations in Washington, the GSA rates vary. For example, the rates are:

- \$156 for lodging and \$71 for meals and incidental expenses for Seattle;
- \$88 for lodging and \$61 for meals and incidental expenses for Spokane; and
- \$137 for lodging and \$56 for meals and incidental expenses for Vancouver.

**Summary of Bill:**

The statutory dollar threshold of \$25 for per diem payments to district employees and officials, in lieu of payment for actual expenses, is removed. Rather than setting the maximum per diem rate at \$25 per day, statute provides that the per diem rate may not exceed the GSA's per diem rates.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The statute governing district travel per diem has not be updated since 1965. This bill will provide a much needed update to the statute.

This bill will increase government efficiency. Actual travel costs for district employees are much greater than \$25 per day; accordingly, employees are being reimbursed for actual costs instead of at the per diem rate. Processing reimbursements for actual costs, as well delays associated with that process, is inefficient and costs more than reimbursing at a per diem rate. Also, some district employees do not make large salaries and paying out of pocket for travel expenses can be a burden. This bill will align the district per diem rates with the rates used by other state and local government agencies.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Tharinger, prime sponsor; and Brandi Vena, Washington Public Ports Association.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.