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**SENATE BILL 5793**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2022 Regular Session**

**By** Senators C. Wilson, Trudeau, Das, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Lovelett, Nguyen, Nobles, and Saldaña; by request of Attorney General

AN ACT Relating to stipends for low-income or underrepresented community members of state boards, commissions, councils, committees, and other similar groups; adding a new section to chapter 43.03 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that equitable public policy discussions should include individuals directly impacted by that policy. In order to do so, the legislature supports removing barriers to that participation. The legislature finds that asking community members with lower financial means to volunteer their time and expertise while state employees and representatives of advocacy organizations receive compensation from their respective agency or organization for their time and experience ultimately hinders full and open public participation. As a result, the legislature finds that removing financial barriers for those individuals fosters increased access to government and enriches public policy discussions and decisions, ultimately leading to more equitable and sustainable policy outcomes.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.03 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Except as otherwise provided in this section, any member of a group formed by a state office, agency, board, commission, or other similar entity is eligible to receive stipends for their participation, provided the member is:

(a) Low income; or

(b) Part of an underrepresented demographic that will be directly or disproportionately impacted by decisions made by the group.

(2) Regardless of eligibility, members shall not receive stipends if they are employed by a federal, state, or local government agency and otherwise receiving compensation from such government for their participation as a member of the group that day.

(3) Agencies, boards, commissions, and other similar groups retain discretion over whether to provide stipends to group members as well as to determine the amount of the stipend as provided by this section. Nothing in this section requires groups to provide stipends.

(4) Stipends shall not exceed $200 for each day during which the member attends an official meeting or performs statutorily prescribed duties approved by the chairperson of the group.

(5) Individuals eligible for stipends under this section are eligible for reasonable allowances for child and adult care reimbursement, lodging, and travel expenses as provided in RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060 in addition to stipend amounts.

(6) Nothing in this section creates an employment relationship, or any membership or qualification in any state or other publicly supported retirement system, for this or any other title due to the payment of a stipend, lodging and travel expenses, or child care expenses provided under this section where such a relationship, membership, or qualification did not already exist.

(7) Agencies, boards, commissions, and other similar groups shall take reasonable measures to ensure that the process of seeking and securing stipends is made accessible to eligible members of groups.

(8) An agency may provide a stipend to individuals with lived experience who are not otherwise compensated for their attendance at meetings to support their participation in class one groups when the agency determines such participation is desirable in order to implement principles of equity as described in RCW 43.06D.020.

(9) Stipends and reimbursements do not count as income or assets when calculating an individual's eligibility for state benefits.

(10) The office of financial management must establish model policies to assist in carrying out the purposes of RCW 43.03.220, 43.03.230, 43.03.240, 43.03.250, and 43.03.265, and reimbursement of other expenses authorized under this chapter for members of groups described in RCW 43.03.220 including regulation of compensation or stipends and the conditions under which stipends and reimbursements shall be paid, so as to improve efficiency and to ensure proper use and accountability of compensation strictly in the public interest and for public purposes only.

(11) The office of financial management must convene a work group of state agencies to provide feedback and recommendations for the model policies under subsection (10) of this section. The work group expires July 1, 2023.

(12) For the purposes of this section:

(a) "Low-income" means an individual whose income is not more than 400 percent of the federal poverty level, adjusted for family size.

(b) "Group" means a board, commission, council, committee, or other similar group.

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