

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2357

As Passed House:
February 12, 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:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/22/24, 2/5/24 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

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

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires a longevity bonus of \$15,000 be paid to Washington State Patrol (WSP) employees achieving 26 or more years of service.
- Excludes the bonus from the calculation of salary for the purposes of 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.
- Requires that the program expire on June 30, 2029.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice

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Chair; Timmons, Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Low, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Robertson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berry, Bronoske, Chapman, Cortes, Dent, Doglio, Duerr, Entenman, Goehner, Griffey, Hackney, Klicker, Mena, Nance, Orcutt, Ramel, Ramos, Schmidt, Volz, Walsh and Wylie.

Staff: Beth Redfield (786-7140).

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 nonfield force positions supported by the transportation budget. As of November 2023 vacancy rates are estimated at about 23 percent. In 2024 122 commissioned staff will be eligible for retirement.

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.

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

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Beginning on July 1, 2024, the WSP is directed to issue annual longevity bonuses to eligible employees completing 26 or more years of service, on the employee's anniversary date of state employment.

An "eligible commissioned employee" is defined to mean a WSP employee with 26 or more years of service in the WSPRS.

Intent language states that the bonus is time-limited and targeted at retaining senior personnel and is not intended to be included in average final salary for purposes of calculating pension benefits.

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

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

- the program's 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 program.

The program expires June 30, 2029.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 12, 2024.

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 challenges faced by the WSP are no secret. The Legislature has come up with creative ways to recruit and retain those who serve the state, and what was started must be continued. It is said that there will be 124 more state patrol retirees this year—those men and women can still serve in the WSP—there is a desire to retain them, and that is the purpose of the bonus. The WSP wishes they were not still in this position and are concerned that troopers need to represent the community but are still about 25 percent short. The bill is time-limited and could end earlier if the state gets more recruits in the system. These strategies take time, but the staff shortage in the short term needs to be addressed. The JLARC performance review will also look at the appropriate level of troopers in the field. For the first time, the WSP will conduct lateral hire training to begin in late February. There are currently certified peace officers who chose law enforcement as their profession and want to be troopers. Now the WSP are turning to retention of the senior troopers, who are eligible to retire after 25 years of service and are doing so in concerning numbers. It used to be common to serve for 30 or 35 years on the job. In today's environment on the highways and with other opportunities, it is hard to retain senior troopers. They mentor, train, and instill the traditions of the WSP in the younger troopers. Folks show up to work every day to make a difference to keep the roadways safe. Serious injury and fatality crashes are on the rise, and it is difficult to make a large impact with the number of vacancies that we have. More officers on the road are potential lives saved.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Jake Fey, prime sponsor; Representative Andrew Barkis; Spike Unruh, Washington State Patrol Troopers Association; and Jason Linn, Washington State Patrol Lieutenants and Captains Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.