

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5550

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Transportation

**Title:** An act relating to addressing workforce development issues, including cultural issues, at the Washington state ferries.

**Brief Description:** Addressing workforce development issues, including cultural issues, at the Washington state ferries.

**Sponsors:** Senators Liias, Randall, Valdez, Lovick, Wilson, C., Lovelett, Kauffman, Shewmake, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Nguyen, Nobles, Robinson and Van De Wege.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Transportation: 3/15/23, 4/4/23 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Directs the Washington State Ferries (WSF) to adopt a formal strategy to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of its employee recruitment and retention efforts.
- Directs the WSF to annually conduct an employee survey on workplace conditions and perform an in-depth cultural assessment.
- Directs the WSF to develop programs for transferring knowledge through formalized mentorship and apprenticeship programs.
- Directs the WSF to adopt a formal policy to assist job applicants in gaining the required maritime credentialing necessary for entry level positions.
- Directs the WSF to develop a staffing model to forecast staffing needs and succession planning for future biennia, set a target level of operational overtime, and report on staffing progress for deck, terminal, maintenance, and engine room employees.

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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.*

- Directs the WSF to partner with maritime academies and training facilities to offer instruction to current or prospective employees.

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## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 23 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice 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, Griffey, Hackney, Mena, Ramel, Ramos, Taylor and Wylie.

**Minority Report:** Without recommendation. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Goehner, Klicker, Orcutt, Volz and Walsh.

**Staff:** Beth Redfield (786-7140).

### **Background:**

Washington State Ferries (WSF) provides service on nine ferry routes with almost 450 sailings per day. In 2021 the WSF temporarily switched to alternate service schedules on most routes to reduce last-minute sailing cancellations caused by crewing challenges. In March of 2022 the WSF released its Service Restoration Plan which outlines steps to restore service on a route-by-route basis, dependent on crew and vessel availability and service reliability during a trial restoration period.

The 2021-23 Biennial Transportation Budget directed the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) to develop a workforce plan for the WSF, addressing the staffing shortage, career advancement and retention, recruitment and hiring, cultural issues, and succession planning. The JTC study implementation plan includes a comprehensive set of recommendations, including that a formal diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy must be included in the WSF's employee advancement and retention efforts.

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### **Summary of Bill:**

The WSF is directed to adopt a formal strategy to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of its efforts relating to recruitment, employee development and retention, and agency branding for workforce marketing materials.

The WSF must annually conduct an employee survey on workplace conditions which must be used to perform an in-depth cultural assessment; identify issues of concern among the

workforce; and form an action plan to remediate any cultural issues identified. A summary of survey results and corresponding action planning must be submitted with each biennial budget submission, beginning with the 2025-27 Biennial Transportation Budget.

In consultation with labor partners, the WSF must develop programs for transferring knowledge through formalized mentorship and apprenticeship programs. The WSF must also adopt a formal policy to assist job applicants in gaining the required United States Coast Guard documentation and maritime credentialing necessary for entry level positions. Assistance for prospective employees may include both financial and technical assistance.

The WSF must continuously evaluate management practices concerning recruitment and hiring, staffing levels, scheduling practices, compensation, and agency technology needs, to optimize system and administrative performance.

The WSF must develop a staffing model to forecast staffing needs and succession planning for future biennia, set a target level of operational overtime, and report on staffing progress for deck, terminal, maintenance, and engine room employees as part of each biennial budget submission, beginning with the 2025-27 Biennial Transportation Budget.

The WSF may partner with maritime academies and training facilities to offer instruction, including electronic learning, internships, or apprenticeships, to current or prospective employees.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**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 WSF is an essential part of the highway systems in the state of Washington. It is not a surprise that there are workforce challenges just like there are across the maritime industry. This is an opportunity not just to rebuild the workforce but to rebuild a resilient and diverse workforce for the future. This bill is not critical of the WSF, it is about empowering them to reach goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion and giving them the tools and the blueprint received from the JTC study. The state is lucky to have the amazing workers at our ferry system and we need more of them so that the existing workforce isn't overworked to the point of exhaustion and burnout. This bill intends and envisions to give them resources and support to continue to meet the critical mission they perform for the people of our state. Ferry workers look forward to working with the ferry system on the issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and training. This bill will help WSF

take the next step forward. The licensed deck officers really like that the bill codifies what we are already doing, working with the WSF management to put together the training and mentorships programs. The program to increase the number of mates coming out of training is working, the first 15 new mates are just about to graduate, which has not happened in a while. We are concentrating on making the programs more diverse and available to underrepresented communities.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Marko Liias, prime sponsor; Eric Winge, Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association; Gordon Baxter, Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific; and Daniel Twohig, International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots.

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