

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5699

As of February 13, 2023

Title: An act relating to increasing the compensation for members of the fish and wildlife commission.

Brief Description: Increasing the compensation for members of the fish and wildlife commission.

Sponsors: Senators Van De Wege, Salomon, Hunt, Warnick, Short and Muzzall.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 2/13/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes that Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) members are eligible to receive compensation up to \$200 per day, rather than \$100 per day, during which the commissioner attends an official Commission meeting or performs statutorily prescribed duties.
- Provides that commissioners are eligible for reasonable allowances for child and adult care reimbursement for time spent attending official meetings or performing statutorily prescribed duties.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) consists of nine members serving six-year terms. Members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. Three members must reside east of the summit of the Cascade mountains, three must reside west of the summit,

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and the remaining three are at large, and may reside anywhere in the state. No two members may be residents of the same county. If a vacancy occurs on the Commission prior to the expiration of a term, the Governor must appoint a registered voter within 60 days to complete the term.

Persons eligible for appointment as members of the Commission must have general knowledge of the habits and distribution of fish and wildlife and must not hold another state, county, or municipal elective or appointive office. In making appointments to the Commission, the Governor must seek to maintain a balance reflecting all aspects of fish and wildlife, including representation recommended by sport fishers, commercial fishers, hunters, private landowners, and environmentalists.

Commissioners are eligible to receive compensation up to \$100 per day during which the Commissioner attends an official Commission meeting or performs statutorily prescribed duties, as long as the Commissioner does not occupy a full-time position in any agency of the federal government, state government, or local government in Washington and receives any compensation from that agency for working that day. Additionally, Commissioners are eligible for reimbursement for travel expenses incurred while engaged in official business away from their usual place of residence.

The Legislature provided the Commission with broad policy and rulemaking authority for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Among other duties, the Commission has the authority to appoint the WDFW director.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. WDFW, the WDFW director, and the Commission are authorized to regulate state fish and wildlife resources and to issue licenses for fishing and hunting activities. WDFW also manages nearly 1 million acres of public land for fish and wildlife, habitat conservation, and wildlife-oriented recreation.

Summary of Bill: Commission members are eligible to receive compensation up to \$200 per day, rather than \$100 per day, during which the commissioner attends an official Commission meeting or performs statutorily prescribed duties, as long as the commissioner does not occupy a full-time position in any agency of the federal government, state government, or local government and receives any compensation from that agency for working that day.

In addition, members are eligible for reasonable allowances for child and adult care reimbursement for time spent attending official meetings or performing statutorily prescribed duties approved by the chair of the Commission. When possible, WDFW will minimize the impact of stipends and reimbursements on public assistance, as well as pension eligibility and benefit amounts.

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 childcare expenses where such a relationship, membership, or qualification did not already exist.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Commissioners put in a lot of time in commission meetings and additional hours meeting with DFW employees and stakeholders, and researching the issues that come before the commission. The state needs Commissioners that are qualified to serve in this challenging position and will put in the time necessary to do it well. This bill is a step towards fairly compensating them for their time, expertise, and dedication. By increasing the stipend from \$100 to \$200 a day and providing for reimbursement for childcare and adult care expenses, the bill will begin to eliminate the current equity barrier to serving on the commission. With the current stipend, few working-aged people can afford to be a commissioner because there is far too much Commission work to do alongside a full-time job, resulting in a lack of diversity.

CON: This bill is intended to increase the number of candidates to fill vacancies on the Commission. This compensation increase will lead to more candidates, but not more diversity. The bill language says not to exceed \$200 a day, and that implies that there could be some variance in the compensation. The bill does not specify who determines how much Commissioners will be compensated.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Kevin Van De Wege, Prime Sponsor; Samantha Bruegger, Washington Wildlife First.

CON: Dale Magart.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.