

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5808

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As of January 9, 2024

**Title:** An act relating to granting interest arbitration to certain public safety telecommunications.

**Brief Description:** Granting interest arbitration to certain public safety telecommunications.

**Sponsors:** Senators Van De Wege, Lovick, Conway, Trudeau, Nguyen, Kuderer, Randall, Dhingra, Hunt, Valdez, Keiser, Stanford, Lias, Hasegawa and Shewmake.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Labor & Commerce: 1/09/24.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Provides interest arbitration for public safety telecommunications employed by public employers.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & COMMERCE

**Staff:** Jarrett Sacks (786-7448)

**Background:** The Public Employees' Collective Bargaining Act. The Public Employees' Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA) provides for collective bargaining of wages, hours, and working conditions with employees of cities, counties, and other political subdivisions, as well as to certain employees of institutions of higher education. For certain uniformed personnel under PECBA, there is a public policy against strikes as a means of settling labor disputes. To resolve impasses over contract negotiations with these personnel, the PECBA requires binding interest arbitration if negotiations for a contract reach impasse and cannot be resolved through mediation. Under interest arbitration, an impartial third-party makes decisions regarding the unresolved terms of the contract. There are statutory procedures for parties to select arbitrators and factors the arbitration panel must consider when making its decision.

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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.*

Public Safety Telecommunicators. In 2022, the Legislature established a certification board to create a statewide certification and training program for public safety telecommunicators. A public safety telecommunicator is a first responder working in a primary public safety answering point, regardless of title, who has successfully completed the state training, certification, or recertification standards. This includes an employee of the state, a local public agency, or an independent governmental agency whose primary responsibility is to receive, process, transmit, or dispatch 911 emergency and nonemergency calls for law enforcement, fire, emergency medical, and other public safety services by telephone, radio, or other communication devices and includes an individual who promoted from this position and supervises individuals who perform these functions.

**Summary of Bill:** The interest arbitration procedures for uniformed personnel under PECBA are applied to public safety telecommunicators employed by public employers.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 2, 2024.

**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: Dispatchers are often held to the same standard as law enforcement officers due to their access to sensitive information. There are pluses and minuses to interest arbitration, but it ensures contract negotiations proceed smoothly and get settled. There is a need for an impartial body to step in when there are disagreements between employees and management. Staffing for dispatchers is at a breaking point and there is a staffing crisis, but the workers cannot go on strike without putting public safety at risk.

OTHER: The bill will make negotiations longer and more expensive because employers may need to hire outside counsel to deal with arbitration. Arbitrators are also difficult to find so the negotiations may be prolonged. There should be a standalone statute that addresses the fiscal ability of the employer to pay and the statute should require arbitrators to consider what employers can afford.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Kevin Van De Wege, Prime Sponsor; Seamus Petrie, Washington Public Employees Association; Kristin Woodrow, Teamsters 117; Tanya McCambell, Teamsters 117; Brandy Clift, Teamsters 117.

OTHER: Candice Bock, Association of Washington Cities; Mike Hoover, Washington State Association of Counties.

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