

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1511

As Passed House:
March 4, 2025

Title: An act relating to Washington state ferries captains.

Brief Description: Concerning Washington state ferries captains.

Sponsors: Representatives Parshley, Fosse, Berry, Reed, Simmons, Leavitt, Fitzgibbon, Ramel and Paul.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Labor & Workplace Standards: 1/28/25, 2/7/25 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/4/25, 93-3.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows Washington State Ferries (WSF) captains' bargaining unit to vote to consolidate with the WSF mates' bargaining unit.
- Redefines WSF captains' duties so that they do not manage or supervise the vessel.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & WORKPLACE STANDARDS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Berry, Chair; Fosse, Vice Chair; Scott, Vice Chair; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Ybarra, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bronoske, McEntire and Obras.

Staff: Benjamin McCarthy (786-7116).

Background:

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.

The Washington State Department of Transportation Ferries Division, or Washington State Ferries (WSF), operates and maintains ferry vessels; constructs, operates, and maintains terminals; and acquires vessels. The WSF maintains a fleet of 21 ferries that carry passengers on 10 routes between 20 terminals. The WSF has nearly 2,000 employees.

The WSF employees have collective bargaining rights and bargain with the state over wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment. The employer, for purposes of bargaining with the collective bargaining representative of ferry workers, is the state. The state is represented by the Governor or the Governor's designee.

The International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots represent three WSF bargaining units: the mates, watch center supervisors, and captains (also called masters).

Captains are responsible for, manage, and are the ultimate authority on a state ferry vessel while it is in service. A captain's responsibilities include ensuring safe navigation of the vessel; following applicable federal, state, and agency policies and regulations; supervising crew; overseeing all aspects of vessel operations; satisfying performance expectations; and managing vessel arrivals, departures, and other operations.

Summary of Bill:

The WSF captains' duties are redefined to remove references to managing or supervising the vessel under their command. In addition to federal and state laws and regulations and agency policies, captains are responsible for following applicable international law and regulation.

If the majority of the captains in the captains' bargaining unit vote, by August 31, 2025, to consolidate with the mates' bargaining unit, the Public Employment Relations Commission must certify a combined bargaining unit. The new unit will become effective on July 1, 2026. If the units are consolidated, the state and the exclusive bargaining unit of the consolidated unit must negotiate a collective bargaining agreement.

If the captains do not vote to consolidate with the mates' bargaining unit, the employer and the captains' exclusive bargaining representative must continue to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement separately from the mates' bargaining unit.

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) There is no policy justification for splitting the captains from the mates. This will streamline collective bargaining, reduce inefficiencies, and reduce administrative costs. There are inherent dangers of having two bargaining units: it can lead to different interpretations of identical language in different contracts, the inversion of wages, or different dispatch procedures. So far, having two separate bargaining units has not caused significant problems, but it creates a risk.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Lisa Parshley, prime sponsor; and Dan Twohig, International Association of Masters, Mates and Pilots.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.