

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5413

AS OF FEBRUARY 17, 1993

Brief Description: Extending laws against discrimination to employers of one or more persons.

SPONSORS: Senators Prentice, Pelz, Fraser, Spanel, Niemi, McAuliffe and Talmadge

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Staff: Tom Fender (786-7414)

Hearing Dates: February 18, 1993

BACKGROUND:

The Human Rights Commission is the agency responsible for enforcing and educating Washington's employers on the subject of employee discrimination. It provides as an alternative to litigation an administrative process by which employees may challenge work rules and conditions that are discriminatory.

Currently, this law applies only to employers who employ eight or more persons and does not apply in any way to religious or sectarian organizations that operate on a not-for-profit basis. Within this context, recent economic trends have resulted in a forecast of employment growth predominately in the small business sector. As such, there is a concern that employees displaced to or entering into small business are being afforded a lower tier of civil rights protection.

Additionally, it has been suggested that the current economic climate has exacerbated workplace tensions and increased the displacement of workers who are currently within a protected class. Accordingly, there is a belief that the educational programs that have been conducted primarily in larger businesses and government should be extended to small employers as well. The proponents of these thoughts report that training and education programs may be facilitated through trade and professional associations.

SUMMARY:

The legislative intent to provide a discrimination-free employment environment is expanded and the Legislature declares that employers and employees shall be trained and educated to reduce the economic and social costs of employment discrimination. The Human Rights Commission Act is expanded so as to apply to all employers.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested