

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5451

As of February 8, 1999

Title: An act relating to the injured workers' ombudsman.

Brief Description: Creating the office of industrial insurance ombudsman within the governor's office.

Sponsors: Senators Swecker, Rasmussen, Winsley, Morton, Prentice, Hargrove, Zarelli, Hochstatter, Oke and Gardner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Labor & Workforce Development: 2/8/99.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Jack Brummel (786-7428)

Background: The 1998 report on the Worker's Compensation System Performance Audit published by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, noted that one striking feature of Washington's system was the multiple levels of dispute resolution. The authors of the report found that, while a great deal of effort is devoted to the formal procedures for resolving disputes, it is often much more important to the overall functioning of the system to have policies and procedures which avoid disputes. The report recommended that a system of mediators or ombudsmen be created to provide assistance to workers and employers with workers' compensation problems.

Summary of Bill: The Office of Industrial Insurance Ombudsman is created within the Office of the Governor. The Governor is to appoint an ombudsman for a term of three years.

The ombudsman is to provide information on the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, investigate complaints, monitor the Department of Labor and Industries' procedures and recommend changes in them, and submit to the Governor and the Legislature a report on the complaints received with recommendations for legislation.

Investigative records and other material that by law is confidential must remain so, and all other matters will be treated as confidential as much as is practicable.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 3, 1999.

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