
**Technology, Energy &
Communications Committee**

HB 3144

Brief Description: Creating a consumer protection web site and information line.

Sponsors: Representatives Liias, Loomis, Hunt, Miloscia, Rolfes, Upthegrove, Linville, Green, VanDeWege, Morrell, Conway, Kelley, Nelson, Santos and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Information Services to develop a Consumer Protection Portal and toll-free information line.

Hearing Date: 1/30/08

Staff: Kara Durbin (786-7133).

Background:

Office of Regulatory Assistance: The Washington Office of Regulatory Assistance (ORA) was created in the Office of Financial Management in 2003 as an expansion of the Office of Permit Assistance. The ORA helps answer permitting questions and provides access to information about state regulations. In addition, the ORA assists with coordinating between the layers of state, local, and federal permit review.

The ORA has two primary ways it delivers its services: a regulatory help desk assisting approximately 2,000 callers per year; and case managers located in regional offices who facilitate, coordinate, and help resolve disputes that can arise in permitting. The ORA acts as an informal coordinating agency for the permitting processes at the Department of Ecology, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Department of Health. The ORA also maintains an extensive website, which includes permitting information and a link to the Business Portal: <http://www.ora.wa.gov/>.

Business Portal: In January of 2006, several state agencies, and a representative for local jurisdictions, signed a Project Charter, which created a process to develop and implement a one-

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stop business portal for Washington citizens and businesses called the Business Portal. In February of 2006, the Governor in Executive Order 06-02 directed all regulatory, taxing, and permitting agencies to improve and simplify service to Washington citizens. Part of that directive was to develop the Business Portal as a single, secure online portal to make licensing, permitting, regulatory approvals or filings, and tax collections easier for businesses.

Approximately 22 state and local government agencies were involved in the development of the Business Portal. The final product was released on June 21, 2007: <http://www.business.wa.gov/>.

Attorney General's Office: The Attorney General's Office (AGO) is responsible for enforcing many of the state's consumer protection laws. The Consumer Protection Division of the AGO performs several consumer protection related functions, including educating the public on issues such as identity theft; mediating complaints between consumers and businesses; and administering the state's lemon law for new motor vehicle warranty enforcement.

The AGO's web site maintains some consumer protection related information on its web site. In addition, many state agencies provide consumer protection related information on their individual web sites.

Summary of Bill:

Consumer Protection Portal: The Department of Information Services (DIS) must coordinate among state agencies to develop a Consumer Protection Portal (Portal). The Portal will serve as a one-stop web site for consumer information.

At a minimum, the web site must provide information or links to information on:

- insurance information provided by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner;
- child care information provided by the Department of Early Learning;
- financial information provided by the Department of Financial Institutions;
- health care information provided by the Department of Health;
- home care information provided by the Home Care Quality Authority;
- licensing information provided by the Department of Licensing; and
- other information available on existing state agency web sites that may be helpful to consumers.

In developing this Portal, the DIS shall use the Business Portal and the Office of Regulatory Assistance Portal as a model. The DIS must develop navigation and display standards for the Portal to ensure a consistent end-user experience.

By September 1, 2008, state agencies must report to the DIS on whether they maintain resources for consumers that could be made available through the Portal.

The DIS must make the Portal available to the public by December 1, 2008.

Consumer Protection Information Line: The DIS must create a toll-free information line to assist consumer in accessing services available through the Portal.

The DIS must review the usage of the information line annually and report to the Legislature on whether it is a cost-effective resource for consumers. The DIS may discontinue the information line if it is no longer cost-effective.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 25, 2008.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.