

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5189

As of February 12, 2013

Title: An act relating to photovoltaic electrical systems.

Brief Description: Concerning photovoltaic electrical systems.

Sponsors: Senators Smith, Benton, Braun, Becker, Padden, Hill, Bailey, Sheldon, Dammeier, Honeyford and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Commerce & Labor: 2/06/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Staff: Edith Rice (786-7444)

Background: Consistent with current state law, it is unlawful for any person, firm, partnership, corporation, or other entity to advertise, offer to do work, submit a bid, engage in, conduct, or carry on the business of installing or maintaining wires or equipment to convey electric current, or installing or maintaining equipment to be operated by electric current as it pertains to the electrical industry, without having a valid electrical contractor license, issued by the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I).

In addition, in order to work in the electrical construction trade, one must have a valid master journeyman electrician certificate of competency, journeyman electrician certificate of competency, master specialty electrician certificate of competency, or specialty electrician certificate of competency issued by L&I as required by law.

Electrical contractor specialties include, but are not limited to residential, pump and irrigation, limited energy system, signs, nonresidential maintenance, restricted nonresidential maintenance, appliance repair, and a combination specialty.

A limited energy system electrician certificate is a specialty electrician certificate and in order to take the exam for certification, requires 48 hours of basic classroom instruction and 4000 documented hours working in the specialty under supervision of a certified electrician or equivalent training or experience in the U.S. military or another state.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

A telecommunications electrician certificate is limited to the installation, maintenance, and testing of telecommunications systems, and associated hardware, pathway systems, and cable management systems.

Photovoltaic (PV) installer certification offered by the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (Board) requires a minimum number of training hours in advanced PV training from one of five specified education programs. It also requires Occupational Safety and Health Administration training, and documentation of several installations.

Summary of Bill: L&I will issue an endorsement to allow individuals to install, maintain, replace, or repair PV electrical systems if the individual has a limited energy system electrician certification or a telecommunications electrician certificate, and is able to show proof of additional certification from the Board or an equivalent board.

Work performed under the PV electrical system endorsement is limited to systems that generate a maximum of 90 volts and 25 kw of power.

L&I is authorized to adopt rules to implement these requirements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We do not have enough licensed individuals in rural areas to keep up with the demand. The scope of work for these jobs works well for the industry. This is for small systems, not commercial ones.

CON: This will take work away from licensed electricians. These systems are potentially lethal and could injure or kill those who work on them. They need proper training. Licensed electricians are willing to travel and would do this work. If there is a problem the response will be that solar power is the problem, not improperly trained individuals. This will hurt the solar industry. There is no telecommunications certification in Washington.

OTHER: We have concerns about risks to workers and to the public.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Smith, prime sponsor; Jeff Bashe, Seymour Channels Satellite.

CON: Nicole Grant, Certified Electrical Workers of WA; Darrell Chapman, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 191; Larry Steves, National Electrical Contractors Assn.; Dever Kuni, South Sound Solar, Inc.; David Myers, WA State Building and Construction Trades Council.

OTHER: Tamara Jones, L&I.