

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1526

As Reported by House Committee On:
Labor & Workplace Standards

Title: An act relating to state electrical inspectors' salaries.

Brief Description: Concerning state electrical inspectors' salaries.

Sponsors: Representatives Fosse, Maycumber, Ramel, Berry, Cortes, Bronoske, Peterson, Slatter, Ormsby, Doglio, Macri, Reed and Riccelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Labor & Workplace Standards: 1/31/23, 2/14/23 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires salaries of state electrical inspectors to be at least the statewide average of the prevailing rate of wage, excluding usual benefits and overtime, for journey level electricians, or a salary determined by the Director of the Department of Labor and Industries, together with travel expenses, whichever amount is higher.
- Requires that state electrical inspector wage rates be adjusted when prevailing wage rates are adjusted.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & WORKPLACE STANDARDS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Berry, Chair; Fosse, Vice Chair; Robertson, Ranking Minority Member; Schmidt, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bronoske, Connors, Doglio, Ormsby and Ortiz-Self.

Staff: Trudes Tango (786-7384).

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.

Background:

Electrical Inspections.

Except for a few exemptions, a person doing installation, alteration, or maintenance of any electrical system or equipment must first purchase an electrical work permit. When the work is complete, the person must request an electrical inspection within three working days after completing the work or within one working day after any part of the installation has been energized. A person may be subject to civil penalties for failing to obtain required permits or inspections.

The Department of Labor and Industries (Department) administers the electrical requirements. Several cities issue their own permits and conduct their own inspections within their local city limits. The Department issues permits and conducts inspections throughout the state, except for within the cities that have their own inspection programs.

The Department's electrical inspectors must have certain minimum training and experience, such as a minimum of four years of experience as a journeyman electrician in the electrical construction trade installing and maintaining electrical wiring and equipment, or a combination of a certain number of years of electrical training in a college of electrical engineering and a certain number of years of continuous practical electrical experience in installation work.

The salaries and expenses of state inspectors are paid entirely out of the Electrical License Fund. Fees associated with electrical work include electrical plan review fees, permit fees, and inspection fees.

Prevailing Wage Rates.

State law requires that prevailing wages be paid to laborers, workers, and mechanics employed in all public works and public building service maintenance contracts. The prevailing rate of wage is the hourly wage, usual benefits, and overtime paid to the majority of workers in the same trade or occupation in the largest city in the county where the work is performed. The Department's industrial statistician establishes prevailing wage rates based on collective bargaining agreements for a trade or occupation. For a trade or occupation with more than one agreement in a county, the Department will adopt the higher rate. For trades and occupations for which there are no collective bargaining agreements in a county, the Department will conduct wage surveys. The Department adjusts prevailing wage rates twice a year.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

State electrical inspectors must be paid at least the statewide average of the prevailing rate of wage, excluding usual benefits and overtime, in the applicable scope of work for journey level electricians, or a salary determined by the Director of the Department, together with

travel expenses, whichever amount is higher. Wage rates must be adjusted at the same time as prevailing wage rates.

When determining the statewide average, the Department must use as the denominator the number of wage rates across all counties in the same trade or occupation, rather than the wage rate for each individual county.

The Department must provide an annual report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature, beginning December 1, 2024, of the following information:

- the increase in the number of electrical inspectors hired after changes to the salaries;
- any changes in the Department's response time to requests for electrical inspections;
- any changes in the wait times for electrical inspections;
- any changes to the use of virtual electrical inspections; and
- any barriers to virtual inspections and recommendations to increase the number of virtual inspections conducted by the Department.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill adds provisions requiring the Department to provide annual reports to the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 14, 2023.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: 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 are less than 200 state inspectors and this shortage causes delays, which is problematic for reaching the state's climate and solar goals. Increasing the inspectors' salaries to be more competitive with electricians across the state will help prevent the backlog of inspection requests. Electrification is the future of energy and modern buildings, and the state needs to be able to pay inspectors a rate that attracts and retains them. Currently the Department has a hard time recruiting and retaining qualified inspectors. Inspectors are just as critical as installers, but the pay for state inspectors is substantially lower. This would be entirely funded by user fees.

(Opposed) There needs to be more inspectors; however, the pay raise should come with performance metrics. The Department should be required to report on how long it takes to get inspections done. Virtual inspections should be used more frequently. Having inspectors' wages tied to the statewide average could mean that inspectors are making more

than the electricians in their area.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Mary Fosse, prime sponsor; Nicole Grant, Warren Shill, and Mark Davis, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 46; Jack Knottingham, Clint Bryson, and Timothy O'Donnell Sr., International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 76; and Matthew Hepner, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Certified Electrical Workers of Washington.

(Opposed) Jan Himebaugh, Building Industry Association of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.