

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1638

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to the creation of a state trooper expedited recruitment incentive program.

Brief Description: Creating a state trooper expedited recruitment incentive program.

Sponsors: Representatives Fey, Barkis, Robertson, Lekanoff, Schmidt, Ramel, Duerr, Timmons, Eslick and Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/6/23, 2/16/23 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates the State Trooper Expedited Recruitment Incentive Program (Incentive Program).
- Directs the Washington State Patrol (WSP) to establish hiring procedures and an accelerated training program for lateral hires from other law enforcement agencies in Washington.
- Provides bonuses to cadets and lateral hires in two stages: after completion of the WSP Academy or the accelerated training program and after completion of a one-year probation period.
- Requires the Incentive Program to be subject to the collective bargaining process.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 26 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Timmons, Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member;

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.

Low, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Robertson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bronoske, Chapman, Cortes, Dent, Doglio, Duerr, Entenman, Goehner, Hackney, Klicker, Mena, Orcutt, Ramel, Ramos, Schmidt, Taylor, Volz, Walsh and Wylie.

Staff: Beth Redfield (786-7140).

Background:

The Washington State Patrol (WSP) is responsible for traffic law enforcement, collision investigation, criminal interdiction, terrorism prevention, and motorist assistance on the interstate and state highway systems. The WSP highway field force includes 683 trooper positions. As of September 2022, 187 positions were not filled.

Completion of the WSP Academy is required for all troopers. The academy includes two months of arming class, five months of trooper basic training, and two months of field training. The WSP can generally run four academies in a biennium. Only two classes are funded in the WSP's base budget.

Compensation and personnel matters for troopers are collectively bargained between the state and the troopers' exclusive bargaining representative.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The WSP is directed to develop and implement a State Trooper Expedited Recruitment Incentive Program (Incentive Program) for the purpose of recruiting and filling vacant trooper positions. Recruitment must redouble the effort to create a more diverse workforce and must also provide an accelerated pathway for joining the WSP for individuals who have previously been employed as a General Authority Peace Officer.

The Incentive Program must include hiring procedures and an accelerated training program for lateral hires from other agencies that recognizes the knowledge and experience of candidates previously employed in law enforcement. The Incentive Program must also include a sign-on bonus for each trooper hired through the program. Each cadet will receive \$5,000 after completion of the WSP Academy and \$5,000 after completion of a one-year probation period. Each lateral hire will receive \$7,500 after completion of the accelerated training program for lateral hires and \$7,500 after completion of a one-year probation period.

The establishment of the Incentive Program is subject to a change to the applicable collective bargaining agreements negotiated with the exclusive bargaining representatives.

Expenditures and eligibility for the Incentive Program are subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose.

Two new definitions are provided. "Cadet" is defined as a person employed for the express purpose of receiving the on-the-job training required for attendance at the WSP academy and for becoming a commissioned trooper. "Lateral hire" is defined as an eligible employee previously employed as a General Authority Peace Officer.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill eliminates the requirement that a lateral hire was previously employed in Washington State.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is the outcome of conversations both with the trooper workforce and the Chief of the WSP. Several years ago, there was an average of 400 applicants per month, now it is 53 applicants per month. A lot of law enforcement agencies are offering lateral bonuses. The shortfall is about 25 percent at the WSP and that is unacceptable. It is also unacceptable for people out on our roadways who need some level of protection and response to emergencies on state highways. The Legislature has done a good job over the last several years trying to get salaries comparable to other agencies, but not trying to do more would also be unacceptable. The improvement from four years ago is 99.9 percent due to the Legislature improving salaries and benefits, making the WSP more competitive. After 2020 and the death of George Floyd, applicants dropped by 60 percent to 400 per month. In September 2021 numbers dropped to 85 applicants per month. Currently, it is only 53 applicants per month. Six percent of applicants will make it to an academy class. Now the WSP is down 249 commissioned personnel; these are the people who wear the uniform, badge, taser and gun. That is larger than most law enforcement agencies in the state, barring just a couple. Recruiting is once again a major issue. It is a challenge that people do not want to become law enforcement officers, but also the ones looking for a career in law enforcement can get sign-on bonuses from \$5,000 to \$30,000. Other agencies are recruiting troopers to be lateral transfers. This bill would make the WSP competitive with other agencies, recruiting new officers and recruiting laterals from other agencies. The bill should also allow providing bonuses to lateral hires from out of state. This bill is very timely, the WSP needs to hire much more than they otherwise would have, with the same academy and facilities and recruiting. The WSP has never run a lateral class in hiring and training someone who is already certified as a General Authority Peace Officer. This is

forcing the WSP to look at things in a different way and take advantage of those people who are already trained and still meet the minimum qualifications to be in the WSP, and get some training specific to the WSP. With these unique and accelerated proposals, it will start to chip away at these big vacancy numbers. Reduced number of troopers impacts health and safety of the troopers and time spent with their families. Service levels on the road are down, and is probably one of the reasons for the increase in crashes and fatalities. Washington law enforcement is fifty-first in terms of officers per capita and has been for the last 12 years. In 2021 Washington lost a net of 495 officers, in 2022 it is anticipated to be about 100 officers. This is not sustainable for the agencies or the communities that they serve. Communities rely on troopers and officers to show up quickly on what is potentially the worst day of their lives. Troopers and officers deserve more than to be constantly understaffed and under-resourced and relying on overtime. Investments in the WSP has a positive impact on all law enforcement agencies. To help avoid the possibility of recruiting laterals into a competition, this bill should include out of state applicants. Public safety for business employees and customers is very important. A robust and well trained WSP is really helpful to the community.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Jake Fey, prime sponsor; Davor Gjurasic, Washington State Patrol Troopers Association; Jeff DeVere, Washington State Patrol Lieutenants and Captains Association; Mark Johnson, Washington Retail Association; and Taylor Gardner, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.