
Transportation Committee

SB 5550

Brief Description: Addressing workforce development issues, including cultural issues, at the Washington state ferries.

Sponsors: Senators Liias, Randall, Valdez, Lovick, Wilson, C., Lovelett, Kauffman, Shewmake, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Nguyen, Nobles, Robinson and Van De Wege.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs Washington State Ferries (WSF) to adopt a formal strategy to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of its employee recruitment and retention efforts.
- Directs the WSF to annually conduct an employee survey on workplace conditions and perform an in-depth cultural assessment.
- Directs the WSF to develop programs for transferring knowledge through formalized mentorship and apprenticeship programs.
- Directs the WSF to adopt a formal policy to assist job applicants to gain required maritime credentialing necessary for entry level positions.
- Directs the WSF to develop a staffing model to forecast staffing needs and succession planning for future biennia, set a target level of operational overtime, and report on staffing progress for deck, terminal, maintenance, and engine room employees.
- Directs the WSF to partner with maritime academies and training facilities to offer instruction to current or prospective employees.

Hearing Date: 3/15/23

Staff: Beth Redfield (786-7140).

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:

Washington State Ferries (WSF) provides service on nine ferry routes with almost 450 sailings per day. In 2021, the WSF temporarily switched to alternate service schedules on most routes to reduce last-minute sailing cancellations caused by crewing challenges. In March of 2022, the WSF released its Service Restoration Plan which outlines steps to restore service on a route-by-route basis, dependent on crew and vessel availability and service reliability during a trial restoration period.

The 2021-23 Biennial Transportation Budget directed the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) to develop a workforce plan for the WSF, addressing the staffing shortage, career advancement and retention, recruitment and hiring, cultural issues, and succession planning. The JTC study implementation plan includes a comprehensive set of recommendations, including that a formal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategy must be included in WSF's employee advancement and retention efforts.

Summary of Bill:

The WSF is directed to adopt a formal strategy to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of its efforts relating to recruitment, employee development and retention, and agency branding for workforce marketing materials.

The WSF must annually conduct an employee survey on workplace conditions which must be used to perform an in-depth cultural assessment; identify issues of concern among the workforce; and form an action plan to remediate any cultural issues identified. A summary of survey results and corresponding action planning must be submitted with each biennial budget submission, beginning with the 2025-27 Biennial Transportation Budget.

In consultation with labor partners, the WSF must develop programs for transferring knowledge through formalized mentorship and apprenticeship programs. The WSF must also adopt a formal policy to assist job applicants to gain required United States Coast Guard documentation and maritime credentialing necessary for entry level positions. Assistance to prospective employees may include both financial and technical assistance.

The WSF must continuously evaluate management practices concerning recruitment and hiring, staffing levels, scheduling practices, compensation, and agency technology needs, to optimize system and administrative performance.

The WSF must develop a staffing model to forecast staffing needs and succession planning for future biennia, set a target level of operational overtime, and report on staffing progress for deck, terminal, maintenance, and engine room employees as part of each biennial budget submission, beginning with the 2025-27 Biennial Transportation Budget.

The WSF may partner with maritime academies and training facilities to offer instruction,

including electronic learning, internships, or apprenticeships, to current or prospective employees.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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