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HOUSE BILL 2497

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State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

**By** Representatives Nance, Fitzgibbon, Fey, Abbarno, Peterson, McEntire, Shavers, Street, Pollet, Mena, Berry, Ramos, Slatter, Tharinger, Farivar, Reed, Senn, Walsh, Callan, Davis, Lekanoff, Chapman, Kloba, Donaghy, Simmons, Alvarado, Ryu, and Leavitt

Read first time 02/10/24. Referred to Committee on Transportation.

1 AN ACT Relating to creating the Washington state ferries 75 work  
2 group; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that on June 1,  
5 1951, the state of Washington bought the black ball fleet and  
6 commenced providing auto and passenger ferry service on the Puget  
7 Sound. By the year 1999, the Washington state ferries reached its  
8 peak ridership of 26,800,000 passengers, making the Washington state  
9 ferries the world's second largest ferry fleet. During the 21st  
10 century, ferry service has endured many challenges relating to  
11 financing, aging vessels, labor shortages, and vessel procurement.  
12 The legislature further finds that the Washington state ferries has  
13 not been adequately resourced to fulfill its vital mission.  
14 Therefore, to ensure the financial sustainability and continued  
15 excellence of the Washington state ferries, the legislature intends,  
16 with the 75th anniversary of state ferry service fast approaching, to  
17 evaluate changes to the financing of the state ferry system by June  
18 1, 2026.

19 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The joint transportation committee must  
20 establish the Washington state ferries 75 work group.

1 (1) The work group must include two appointees each from the  
2 house and senate transportation committees, four representatives of  
3 ferry-served communities, a representative of labor, a representative  
4 of the Washington state ferries, and a representative of the  
5 governor's office. The chairs of the house and senate transportation  
6 committees must appoint the members representing the house and  
7 senate, labor unions, and ferry dependent communities. The work group  
8 must elect a chair from amongst its members.

9 (2) The work group must:

10 (a) Evaluate the funding requirements for the Washington state  
11 ferries to reliably operate service;

12 (b) Explore options to increase dedicated funding sources for the  
13 ferry system; and

14 (c) Identify federal funding opportunities and methods to  
15 optimize the Washington state ferries for eligibility, competitive  
16 positioning, and receipt.

17 (3) The work group must report to the governor and appropriate  
18 committees of the legislature as follows:

19 (a) Preliminary findings by January 13, 2025; and

20 (b) Final findings and recommendations by June 1, 2026.

21 (4) This section expires June 1, 2026.

22 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The institute for public policy at The  
23 Evergreen State College must conduct an economic impact study of  
24 ferry service disruptions. The study must examine the impacts on a  
25 statewide and systemwide basis, on all 10 routes of service provided  
26 by the Washington state ferries. The study must include a review of  
27 key factors that impact the overall economy of both ferry-served  
28 communities and the state economy. The study must address economic  
29 impacts on employment, housing, health care costs and access,  
30 emergency response, climate resilience, tourism, and small business.  
31 The data must be used to demonstrate the magnitude of hardships. The  
32 institute must submit a preliminary report to the office of the  
33 governor and the Washington state ferries 75 work group by December  
34 13, 2024. A final report must be submitted to the office of the  
35 governor and the Washington state ferries 75 work group by June 1,  
36 2025.

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