

Disability Benefits for Ferry Engineers

Issue

What should disability benefits for ferry engineers be? The Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) received correspondence asking for a study of disability benefits for ferry engineers. Stakeholders have requested that any ferry engineers who receive a disabling injury receive an unreduced pension.

Background

Ferry engineers are members of the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS). They are subject to the federal Jones Act, rather than state workers' compensation.

Highlights

- ❖ This is the first time the SCPP has studied benefits for ferry engineers.
 - The SCPP has looked at disability benefits in other contexts several times. Perhaps the most directly on point for this issue was the [study of PSERS and LEOFF 2 disability benefits](#) in 2021 (which resulted in the SCPP sponsoring [House Bill 1669](#)).
- ❖ According to the Washington State Department of Transportation, in the last five years only two ferry engineers were injured seriously enough to impact their certification.
 - In both cases, the injury was unrelated to their duties as ferry engineers.
- ❖ If the Committee had chosen to move this forward, here are some sample policy questions staff will be researching:
 1. Are current disability benefits sufficient for ferry engineers?
 2. Are ferry engineer duties sufficiently different (or more dangerous) so as to warrant different benefits?
 3. Should an inability to recertify under U.S. Coast Guard standards qualify as a disability?
 4. What are your goals in revising disability benefits?
 5. Are there alternatives that could meet those goals?

Committee Activity

The Committee received an initial briefing at the July meeting.

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