

Bill: 1st Substitute SB 22 – State Employee Benefit Amendments

Sponsor: Senator Wayne A. Harper

Floor Sponsor: Representative Cheryl K. Acton

UASD Position: Support

This Bill modifies provisions related to public employee benefits.

Discussion: Senator Harper began his presentation by highlighting the differences in benefits between private and public sector employees, particularly in the area of death benefits. SB 22 establishes a death benefit for employees receiving long-term disability benefits and updates the definition of long-term disability, along with the criteria for receiving payments and compensation. The Bill also includes additional guidelines for long-term disability benefits. Notably, it revises the definition of “gainful employment” to encompass any occupation or employment that pays an amount equal to or greater than 40 hours per week at 60% of the eligible employee’s regular monthly salary in the context of Public Employees' Long-Term Disability. The objective of the Bill is to align benefits and compensation with "market rates".

A representative from the Public Employees Health Program (“PEHP”) explained that the disability process occurs in two phases. The first phase is a two-year period in which the employee is assessed for their ability to perform their current job. After this period, the employee is evaluated for their capacity to engage in any occupation, including minimum-wage employment. The eligibility for disability benefits is determined by comparing the employee’s pre-disability earnings to their post-disability earnings; if the individual earns less than 60% of their previous earnings, they may qualify for benefits.

Representative Cutler inquired about the funding mechanism for the Bill. The sponsor explained that the funding would be derived from savings generated by lower premium rates. Representative Cutler also raised a question regarding exempt employees mentioned on line 308. The PEHP representative clarified that there would be tiered levels where the state would cover the difference between exempt and non-exempt employees. Representative Thompson asked whether the Bill would alter the criteria for other employee benefits, such as pensions and retirement benefits. The sponsor confirmed that it would not. Representative Fiefla expressed concerns about whether the increased life insurance benefits could create inequities among state employees and inquired about the rationale behind the selection of tiers. The PEHP representative responded that the state typically makes additional accommodations for exempt employees, with the difference being in who is responsible for covering the costs. The Committee adopted Senate Amendment 1, which deletes “exempt” on line 308.

Yeas: 10

Nays: 0

N/V: 3

Outcome: 1st Substitute SB 22 favorably passed out of the Committee.

Bill: 1st Substitute SB 54 – Appearance of Candidate Name on Ballot

Sponsor: Senator Stephanie Pitcher

Floor Sponsor: Representative Stephanie Gricius

UASD Position: Support

This Bill addresses the manner in which a candidate's name may appear on a ballot.

Discussion: Representative Gricius presented the Bill to the Committee. This Bill addresses how a candidate's name appears on the ballot. Individuals who use a middle or other legitimate name rather than their first name as their primary name on a ballot are allowed to have that chosen name be printed on the ballot. The Bill outlines the process of needing five people to sign an affidavit showing that someone running in an election is known by a name that isn't their first name. The Bill contains exclusionary requirements that each nickname must fulfil, and the election officials will be the ones responsible to enforce those requirements.

Representative MacPherson inquired about potential exceptions under the Bill. Ricky Hatch, representing the Utah Clerks Legislative Committee, clarified that the language was designed to ensure that, unless an election official deems a nickname to be offensive or used as a slogan, there would be no objection to it being printed on the ballot, provided the affidavit is signed by five individuals from the candidate's county. The Utah Clerks Legislative Committee and the Utah Association of Counties expressed support for the Bill.

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

N/V: 4

Outcome: 1st Substitute SB 54 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.
