

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1920

---

### As Reported by House Committee On: State Government & Tribal Affairs

**Title:** An act relating to public employees' attendance at informational or educational meetings regarding legislative issues.

**Brief Description:** Clarifying that public employees may attend informational or educational meetings regarding legislative issues.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Hunt, Hasegawa, Williams, Hudgins, Simpson, Santos, Van De Wege and Ormsby.

#### **Brief History:**

##### **Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 2/12/09, 2/20/09 [DP].

#### **Brief Summary of Bill**

- Allows state employees under the state ethics laws to attend informational and educational meetings on legislative issues with legislators and other elected officials held in public facilities.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Flannigan, Hurst and Miloscia.

**Staff:** Pam Madson (786-7111)

#### **Background:**

The Ethics in Public Service Act prohibits state agencies and employees from authorizing the use of state facilities for political campaigning for individuals or ballot measures.

Public funds may not be used to lobby the Legislature except under circumstances that are specifically authorized. Agencies and employees may provide information and communicate

---

*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

with legislators at the request of the member or on requests to members for legislative action that relate to the agency or employee's official business.

---

**Summary of Bill:**

It is not a violation of state ethics laws for state employees to attend informational and educational meetings on legislative issues with legislators or other elected officials. These meetings may be held in public facilities including state owned and leased buildings. This does not change the prohibition against the use of state facilities for political campaigns or the promotion of, or opposition to, ballot propositions.

---

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) For years, local legislators have been invited by state employee union representatives to meet with state employees in state buildings to talk about legislative issues. Recently, the Executive Ethics Board (Board) determined that this meeting with state employees and legislators could not occur in state buildings. This kind of meeting could be interpreted as using state facilities for political reasons. Legislators have a duty to meet and work with state employees and learn what is going on. There is concern that the Board is following a line of reasoning that exceeds what was intended under the ethics law. The Board treats unions as persons and interprets whatever the organization does as actions that can result in some private gain. A meeting was ultimately rescheduled and held in a state building.

(Opposed) The Board is tasked with enforcing the ethics law. Treating a meeting with legislators as informational or educational could conflict with the prohibition on using state facilities for campaigning or lobbying. More clarification is needed on what constitutes an informational or educational meeting so it is not subject to interpretation.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Hunt, prime sponsor; and Dennis Eagle and Paul Pickett, Washington Federation of State Employees.

(Opposed) Melani deLeon, Executive Ethics Board.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.