

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

ESSB 5193 Annual Report on Reserve Adjudicator Training

OCTOBER 2021

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Introduction

[ESSB 5193](#), unemployment insurance claim adjudicators/system enhancements, Section 2, requires the Employment Security Department (ESD) to create a training program to prepare a reserve force of skilled unemployment insurance claims adjudicators who can be available quickly when claims volume demands. This bill also requires ESD to provide an annual report on the number of persons with current certifications, the number of people employed by the department and over what period of time, and the adjudicator training and hiring costs.

Reserve adjudicators requirements

The adjudicator reserve program needs to be open to public employees and private citizens, and ESD discussed the possibility of using contractors to meet the private citizen requirement. However, the U.S. Department of Labor recently announced that state workforce agencies may use only public employee “merit staff,” which eliminates the possibility of contractors to perform adjudicator work.

The training also needs to be thorough enough so that individuals serving as adjudicator reservists could be certified to perform adjudications on unemployment insurance claims within a week of coming to ESD.

The bill requires the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to work with ESD to identify other state agencies whose employees meet the minimum qualifications to serve as UI claims adjudicators. The Health Care Authority (HCA) and the Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS) have been identified as early potential partners.

The bill gives OFM the right to adopt rules or issue guidance regarding this topic. It requires ESD to submit an annual report to the Legislature starting Oct. 1, 2021, summarizing the number of people who have current UI claims adjudicator certifications, how many have been employed and the period of employment, plus hiring and training costs.

Training program development

ESD prepared a two-week training plan that begins with one week of online training through the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), including adjudicator and customer service training. In the second week, ESD educates trainees on state-specific issues, including unemployment insurance and the IT system that ESD uses for UI claims. Trainees receive certifications from NASWA and ESD for completing this training.

ESD conducted a successful pilot this summer with 25 interns and will conduct the first training for external parties in 2022. The agency will continue to provide this training to up to 400 non-permanent staff within the next several months. Although the contracts of these staff will conclude in the near future, the goal is to build a large pool that the agency could draw on in a future emergency.

ESD staff and partners will complete a variety of upcoming activities prior to the first training for external parties, including:

- Providing required notifications to union representatives.
- Drafting an interagency agreement for potential partners.
- Adding the NASWA online training and ESD's UI training to the state's training system.
- Developing with NASWA a tool to quickly alert and activate those who complete the adjudicator certifications in the event of future emergencies.
- Developing with NASWA 12 Washington-specific continuing education modules.

Following required consultation with union representatives, ESD is developing a contract with South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) to provide curricula development services. The contract is projected to run from September 20 to Dec. 31, 2021. Contracted curriculum developers for a total 50 hours per week will complete video editing and production tasks, assist with creating assessments and exercises, and publish video content on SharePoint. The work will result in a virtual textbook – a library of content – to be used to train specific tasks and functions when onboarding emergency hires. The virtual textbook will be the main content used for the one-week training existing pool adjudicators will take prior to starting production work.

Training and hiring expenses through September 2021

Training expense

ESD initially envisioned developing all training in house. Upon further research, ESD determined that existing training developed by NASWA was well-suited to meet some of the need for the adjudicator pool training. This training is available to ESD at no charge to the agency or to trainees. Trainees successfully completing the NASWA training receive nationally recognized certifications in (1) UI New Staff and Operations Integrity and (2) Adjudication and Fact Finding. A technical training consultant and two Washington Management Service managers negotiated the contract in 54 total hours at a cost of \$3,991.

To date, two technical training consultants have spent 80 hours working on training content at a cost of \$4,795. Additional expenses will be incurred in the next reporting period.

People with current certifications

ESD piloted the online NASWA training with 25 interns as a proof of concept for the new training model. The interns received certificates in (1) UI New Staff & Operations Integrity and (2) Fact Finding and Adjudication.

People employed by ESD

The class of interns is the only group trained during this reporting period. The interns were not hired under the adjudication pool requirements. They attended the training so ESD could test the feasibility of the training model. Their term of employment is not considered to be part of ESSB 5193.