

MINUTES
SENATE COMMERCE & HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, March 05, 2026

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW54

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Foreman, Vice Chairman Lenney, Senators Lakey, Guthrie, Nichols, Bernt, Zito, and Ward-Engelking

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Ruchti

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Foreman** called the meeting of the Senate Commerce and Human Resources Committee (Committee) to order at 1:30 p.m.

GUBERNATORIAL REAPPOINTMENT VOTE: **Committee Vote on the Gubernatorial Reappointment of Jeff Cilek to the Public Employee Retirement System of Idaho (PERSI) Board.** **Senator Nichols** moved to send the Gubernatorial Reappointment of Jeff Cilek to the PERSI Board, to the floor with the recommendation that he be confirmed by the Senate. **Senator Lakey** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

H 544 **MILITARY - Amends existing law to revise provisions regarding leaves of absence from regular duties for military duty.** **Senator Nichols** reported this was a cleanup bill which updated Idaho's military leave statute for eligible State employees and reservists. She noted the bill increased military leave from 120 to 160 hours to align with updated federal standards and cleaned up conflicting terminology. **Representative Hill** spoke in support of the bill and introduced **Lieutenant Colonel Nate Peterson** of the Idaho National Guard, who explained that the changes in this bill supported training, readiness, and response capabilities.

MOTION: **Senator Guthrie** moved to send **H 544** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Ward-Engelking** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

H 642 **PUBLIC EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT SYSTEM (PERSI)- Amends and repeals existing law to establish public safety officer catastrophic injury or death in the line of duty benefits.** **Senator Lakey** explained that the bill corrected a discrepancy so that if a public safety officer was catastrophically injured and died as a result, the surviving spouse or, if none, the dependent children would receive a \$500,000 lump-sum benefit, with a minimum of \$75,000 for the spouse. He noted that the first \$100,000 continued to be paid by the employer, and that the bill applied retroactively to July 1, 2021, covering three firefighters and one police officer killed in the line of duty. **Senator Lakey** also noted that public safety officers would cover the added cost themselves through increased contributions, rather than shifting cost to other PERSI members or taxpayers.

TESTIMONY: **Matt Smith**, Professional Firefighters of Idaho, testified in support, emphasizing the need for clear and consistent catastrophic injury or death benefits, and confirming that firefighters and the Fraternal Order of Police were willing to fund the change.

- MOTION:** **Senator Bernt** moved to send **H 642** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Ward-Engelking** seconded the motion.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Bernt** remarked he never knew what first responders had to go through. He appreciated all and was grateful for this legislation. He commended the firefighters and the police.
- VOTE ON THE MOTION:** The motion to send **H 642** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation carried by **voice vote**.
- H 703** **OCCUPATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LICENSING - Amends, repeals, and adds to existing law to revise provisions regarding the Division of Occupational and Professional Licenses (DOPL).** **Senator Lakey** explained that the 62-page bill consolidated disciplinary powers, processes, and procedures that had previously been scattered across many separate code sections for individual professions, such as architects, geologists, doctors, and cosmetologists. **Senator Lakey** stated the bill centralized these provisions into a single section, Idaho Code § 67-2616, to improve consistency, transparency, and efficiency, while preserving profession-specific fine schedules where appropriate.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Lakey** flagged one needed amendment: the engineers and surveyors fine schedule had been inadvertently deleted and needed to be restored. He requested that the bill be sent to the amending order for that correction.
- DISCUSSION:** In response from a question from **Senator Zito, Colby Redding**, Chief Legal Counsel and Deputy Administrator for DOPL, clarified that DOPL had its own in-house legal team of State-employed attorneys and used some contract prosecutors for DOPL Board work.
- MOTION:** **Senator Nichols** moved to send **H 703** to the 14th Order of Business for possible amendment. **Senator Guthrie** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Foreman** adjourned the meeting at 1:57 p.m.

Senator Foreman
Chair

Linda Kambeitz
Secretary