

HOUSE BILL No. 2696

AN ACT concerning workers compensation; relating to administrative law judges; amending K.S.A. 2005 Supp. 44-551 and 75-5708 and repealing the existing sections.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Kansas:

Section 1. K.S.A. 2005 Supp. 44-551 is hereby amended to read as follows: 44-551. (a) The duties of the assistant directors of workers compensation ~~shall~~ *may* include but not be limited to acting in the capacity of an administrative law judge.

(b) *Each administrative law judge shall be an attorney regularly admitted to practice law in Kansas. Such attorney shall have at least five years of experience as an attorney, with at least one year of experience practicing law in the area of workers compensation.*

(c) *Except as provided in subsection (g), the annual salary of each administrative law judge shall be an amount equal to 75% of the annual salary paid by the state to a district judge, other than a district judge designated as a chief judge. Administrative law judges shall devote full time to the duties of such office and shall not engage in the private practice of law during their term of office. No administrative law judge may receive additional compensation for official services performed by the administrative law judge. Each administrative law judge shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the performance of such official duties under the same circumstances and to the same extent as district judges are reimbursed for such expenses.*

(d) *Applications for administrative law judge positions shall be submitted to the director of workers compensation. The director shall determine if an applicant meets the qualifications for an administrative law judge as prescribed in subsection (b). Qualified applicants for a position of administrative law judge shall be submitted by the director to the workers compensation administrative law judge nominating and review committee for consideration.*

(e) *There is hereby established the workers compensation administrative law judge nominating and review committee which shall be composed of two members appointed as follows: The Kansas AFL-CIO and the Kansas chamber of commerce and industry shall each select one representative to serve on the workers compensation administrative law judge nominating and review committee and shall each give written notice of such selection to the secretary who shall appoint such selected persons to the committee. In the event of a vacancy occurring for any reason on the workers compensation administrative law judge nominating and review committee, the vacating member shall be replaced by the organization which originally selected such member with written notice provided to the secretary within 30 days of such vacancy.*

(f) (1) *Upon being notified of any vacancy in the position of administrative law judge, the administrative law judge nominating and review committee shall consider all qualified applicants submitted by the director for the vacant position of administrative law judge and nominate a person qualified therefor. The administrative law judge nominating and review committee shall be required to reach unanimous agreement on any nomination to the position of administrative law judge. With respect to each person nominated, the secretary either shall accept and appoint the person nominated by the administrative law judge nominating and review committee to the position of administrative law judge for which the nomination was made or shall reject the nomination and request the administrative law judge nominating and review committee to nominate another person for that position. Upon receipt of any such request for the nomination of another person, the administrative law judge nominating and review committee shall nominate another person for that position in the same manner.*

(2) *Each administrative law judge shall hold office for a term of four years and may be reappointed. Each administrative law judge shall continue to serve for the term of the appointment or until a successor is appointed. Successors to such administrative law judge positions shall be appointed for terms of four years.*

(3) *If a vacancy should occur in the position of an administrative law judge during the term of an administrative law judge, the administrative law judge nominating and review committee shall nominate an individual from the qualified applicants submitted by the director to complete the remainder of the unexpired portion of the term.*

(g) *Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, administrative*

law judges appointed on and after July 1, 2006, shall serve a term of office of four years. Administrative law judges hired before July 1, 2006, may continue as administrative law judges under the classified service under the Kansas civil service act at the salary provided under the civil service act or may elect to be appointed to a term and receive the annual salary equal to 75% of the salary prescribed for a district judge if the currently employed administrative law judge within 60 days of the effective date of this section notifies the director in writing that the administrative law judge elects to serve an appointed term of office rather than continuing in the classified service. The term of office for an administrative law judge who elects a term of office shall begin on the date the written election is received by the director and the first term of office for such person shall be for two, three or four years as specified by the secretary so that administrative law judges appointed under this subsection serve staggered terms. Thereafter, any such person if reappointed as an administrative law judge shall be appointed for a term of four years.

(h) Following the completion of a term, an administrative law judge who wishes to be considered for reappointment to such judge's position shall be deemed to have met the qualification requirements for appointment as administrative law judge and shall be considered for renomination by the workers compensation administrative law judge nominating and review committee.

~~(b)~~ (i) (1) Administrative law judges shall have power to administer oaths, certify official acts, take depositions, issue subpoenas, compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of books, accounts, papers, documents and records to the same extent as is conferred on the district courts of this state, and may conduct an investigation, inquiry or hearing on all matters before the administrative law judges. All final orders, awards, modifications of awards, or preliminary awards under K.S.A. 44-534a and amendments thereto made by an administrative law judge shall be subject to review by the board upon written request of any interested party within 10 days. Intermediate Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays shall be excluded in the time computation. Review by the board shall be a prerequisite to judicial review as provided for in K.S.A. 44-556 and amendments thereto. On any such review, the board shall have authority to grant or refuse compensation, or to increase or diminish any award of compensation or to remand any matter to the administrative law judge for further proceedings. The orders of the board under this subsection shall be issued within 30 days from the date arguments were presented by the parties.

(2) (A) If an administrative law judge has entered a preliminary award under K.S.A. 44-534a and amendments thereto, a review by the board shall not be conducted under this section unless it is alleged that the administrative law judge exceeded the administrative law judge's jurisdiction in granting or denying the relief requested at the preliminary hearing. Such an appeal from a preliminary award may be heard and decided by a single member of the board. Members of the board shall hear such preliminary appeals on a rotating basis and the individual board member who decides the appeal shall sign each such decision. The orders of the board under this subsection shall be issued within 30 days from the date arguments were presented by the parties.

(B) If an order on review is not issued by the board within the applicable time period prescribed by subsection ~~(b)~~ (i) (1), medical compensation and any disability compensation as provided in the award of the administrative law judge shall be paid commencing with the first day after such time period and shall continue to be paid until the order of the board is issued, except that no payments shall be made under this provision for any period before the first day after such time period. Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit or restrict any other remedies available to any party to a claim under any other statute.

(C) In any case in which the final award of an administrative law judge is appealed to the board for review under this section and in which the compensability is not an issue to be decided on review by the board, medical compensation shall be payable in accordance with the award of the administrative law judge and shall not be stayed pending such review. The employee may proceed under K.S.A. 44-510k and amendments thereto and may have a hearing in accordance with that statute to enforce the provisions of this subsection.

~~(e)~~ (j) Each assistant director and each administrative law judge or special administrative law judge shall be allowed all reasonable and necessary expenses actually incurred while in the actual discharge of official duties in administering the workers compensation act, but such expenses shall be sworn to by the person incurring the same and be approved by the secretary.

~~(d)~~ (k) In case of emergency the director may appoint special local administrative law judges and assign to them the examination and hearing of any designated case or cases. Such special local administrative law judges shall be attorneys and admitted to practice law in the state of Kansas and shall, as to all cases assigned to them, exercise the same powers as provided by this section for the regular administrative law judges. Special local administrative law judges shall receive a fee commensurate with the services rendered as fixed by rules and regulations adopted by the director. The fees prescribed by this section prior to the effective date of this act shall be effective until different fees are fixed by such rules and regulations.

~~(e)~~ (l) All special local administrative law judge's fees and expenses, with the exception of settlement hearings, shall be paid from the workers compensation administration fee fund, as provided in K.S.A. 74-712 and amendments thereto. Where there are no available funds or where the special local administrative law judge conducted a settlement hearing, the fees shall be taxed as costs in each case heard by such special local administrative law judge and when collected shall be paid directly to such special local administrative law judge by the party charged with the payment of the same.

~~(f)~~ (m) Except as provided for judicial review under K.S.A. 44-556 and amendments thereto, the decisions and awards of the board shall be final.

Sec. 2. K.S.A. 2005 Supp. 75-5708 is hereby amended to read as follows: 75-5708. (a) There is hereby established within and as a part of the department of labor a division of workers compensation. The division shall be administered, under the supervision of the secretary of labor, by the director of workers compensation, who shall be the chief administrative officer of the division. The director of workers compensation shall be appointed by the secretary of labor and shall serve at the pleasure of the secretary. The director shall be in the unclassified service under the Kansas civil service act and shall receive an annual salary fixed by the secretary of labor, with the approval of the governor. The director of workers compensation shall be an attorney admitted to practice law in the state of Kansas. The director shall devote full time to the duties of such office and shall not engage in the private practice of law during the director's term of office.

(b) The director of workers compensation may appoint two assistant directors of workers compensation ~~and also~~. *The secretary of labor may appoint not to exceed 10 administrative law judges. Such assistant directors and administrative law judges shall be in the classified service. Such administrative law judges shall be in the unclassified service under the Kansas civil service act unless an administrative law judge elects to stay in the classified service under subsection (g) of K.S.A. 44-551, and amendments thereto.* The assistant directors shall act for and exercise the powers of the director of workers compensation to the extent authority to do so is delegated by the director. The assistant directors and administrative law judges shall be attorneys admitted to practice law in the state of Kansas, and shall have such powers, duties and functions as are assigned to them by the director or are prescribed by law. The assistant directors and administrative law judges shall devote full time to the duties of their offices and shall not engage in the private practice of law during their terms of office.

(c) Assistant directors ~~and administrative law judges~~ shall be selected by the director of workers compensation, with the approval of the secretary of labor. *Except as otherwise provided under K.S.A. 44-551, and amendments thereto, on and after July 1, 2006, administrative law judges shall be selected by the administrative law judge nominating and review committee and appointed by the secretary of labor.* Each ~~appointee~~ *assistant director and administrative law judge* shall be subject to either dismissal or suspension of up to 30 days for any of the following:

- (1) Failure to conduct oneself in a manner appropriate to the appointee's professional capacity;
- (2) failure to perform duties as required by the workers compensation act; or
- (3) any reason set out for dismissal or suspension in the Kansas civil service act or rules and regulations adopted pursuant thereto.

No appointee shall be appointed, dismissed or suspended for political, religious or racial reasons or by reason of the appointee's sex.

Sec. 3. K.S.A. 2005 Supp. 44-551 and 75-5708 are hereby repealed.

Sec. 4. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its publication in the statute book.

I hereby certify that the above BILL originated in the HOUSE, and passed that body

HOUSE concurred in
SENATE amendments _____

Speaker of the House.

Chief Clerk of the House.

Passed the SENATE
as amended _____

President of the Senate.

Secretary of the Senate.

APPROVED _____

Governor.