

HOUSE RESEARCH

Bill Summary

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Subject: Rights of Workers in Meatpacking Industry

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Overview

H.F. 643 sets forth a bill of rights for workers in the meatpacking industry and establishes a meatpacking industry workers rights ombudsman in the Department of Labor and Industry.

Section

1 Packinghouse Workers Bill of Rights.

Subd. 1. Definition . Specifies that "employer" means an employer with 25 or more employees in the meatpacking industry and defines "meatpacking industry" to include business operations in which slaughtering, butchering, meat canning, meat packing, meat manufacturing, poultry canning, poultry packing, poultry manufacturing, pet food manufacturing, processing of meatpacking products or rendering is conducted.

Subd. 2. Right to adequate facilities. Requires an employer to provide adequate and working restroom facilities; adequate room for meal and rest breaks; adequate locker facilities; and adequate time for necessary restroom breaks. Provides state and federal statutory cross-references to existing rights when available.

Subd. 3. Right to adequate equipment and training. Requires an employer to furnish adequate equipment and training for performance of tasks assigned to employees and requires an employer to make skill development and training opportunities, including

supervisory training, available.

Subd. 4. Information provided to employee. Outlines the minimum information about employee rights and duties that employers must provide to employees in an employee's native language or through written materials, as required by state or federal law or a valid collective bargaining agreement, to include:

- a complete description of the salary and benefit plans;
- a job description;
- a description of leave policies;
- a description of work hours and work hour policies;
- a description of any occupational hazards known to exist;
- information about federal and state rights to organize and bargain collectively;
- information about federal and state rights to a safe workplace; and
- information about federal and state rights to be free from discrimination.

Also provides state and federal statutory cross-references to the items enumerated above.

Subd. 5. Civil Action. Allows any person aggrieved by a violation of this section to file suit in any district court. The penalty for intentional violation of this law may be an award of damages up to and including an amount equal to the original damages plus injunctive relief.

Subd. 6. Criminal Penalty. An employer in violation of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor.

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Meatpacking Industry Workers Rights Ombudsman.

Subd. 1. Position Established. Creates a meatpacking industry workers rights ombudsman within the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI). The commissioner, in consultation with the chairs of the House and Senate committees with jurisdiction over labor and employment issues, appoints the ombudsman.

Subd. 2. Duties. Directs the ombudsman to inspect and review practices and procedures of meatpacking operations in the state and to ensure that worker rights enumerated in section 1 are protected.

Subd. 3. Access. Specifies that the ombudsman or its designee shall have access to all meatpacking operating in the state at any time meatpacking products are being processed and industry workers are on the job.

Subd. 4. Office. Requires DOLI to provide necessary office space, furniture, equipment,

supplies, and assistance as needed for the ombudsman.

Subd. 5. Language preference. Specifies that a preference among applicants for the ombudsman position will be given to persons who are fluent in languages in addition to English.

Subd. 6. Report. Requires the ombudsman to report by December 1 of each year to the legislature and governor on any recommended action necessary to provide for the fair treatment of workers in the meatpacking industry.

3 Appropriation. Provides unspecified appropriations in fiscal year 2008 and 2009 to the commissioner of labor and industry to finance the ombudsman position created in section 2.