

HCS HB 481 -- PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

SPONSOR: Kidd

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Utilities by a vote of 13 to 2.

Currently, the Public Service Commission is required to have an independent technical advisory staff of up to six employees and may retain a personal advisor. This bill modifies these requirements by no longer requiring, but allowing, the commission to retain an independent technical advisory staff of up to 10 employees and a personal advisor to each commissioner.

The bill also specifies that communications with advisory staff and advisors regarding deliberations by the commission or matters that arise during the course of commission proceedings are protected from disclosure. Any advisory staff member or personal advisor who previously worked for an entity regulated by or appearing before the commission may not advise the commission on pending cases in which the advisory staff member or personal advisor participated while employed by the entity.

The bill specifies that no commission may accept or be appointed to any employment with a public utility, corporation, or person subject to supervision of the commission for two years following the termination of their appointment to the commission.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the Public Service Commission functions as a judicial role in utility hearings and cannot discuss cases with the staff other than its personal advisors. This bill would allow the commission to hire the expertise it needs to deliberate on cases, including accountants and economists.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Kidd and the Missouri Public Service Commission.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that this bill erodes the ethics measures in place to protect the public during rate cases. It would allow the commissioners to hire staff that had recently worked for regulated corporations.

Testifying against the bill was the Consumers Council of Missouri.