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WCD**Today**

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WCDToday

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Matt West

Administrator's Notebook:

Message from the WCD Administrator

By Matt West, WCD administrator.

Welcome to another edition of *WCD Today!*

This year has been a period of significant transition for the Workers' Compensation Division (WCD), marked by multiple personnel changes. I am honored to share my first message as the permanent administrator of WCD.

After serving as interim administrator since January 2024, I was officially appointed as WCD's permanent administrator in February 2025.

I am excited for the journey ahead and look forward to working alongside our dedicated team to support our mission to ensure an equitable workers' compensation system for all. Collaboration remains one of our top priorities, and I'm excited to work with you all as we continue to look for ways to improve outcomes for both workers and employers.

In addition to my appointment, we recently welcomed Katie Bruns as WCD's deputy administrator. Katie brings a wealth of experience and expertise, and we are confident in her ability to continue making valuable contributions to the division.



We also want to express our sincere appreciation to Shawn Haywood and Adam Breitenstein for their leadership and service as interim deputy administrators during the transition. Their dedication helped ensure continuity, and we are grateful for their commitment.

Thank you for your continued support as we navigate these changes and work toward a stronger future for WCD.

Legislative and budget update

The 2025 legislative session recently ended, and was a busy one for us. Administrators from the Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS) testified before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development in February about the agency's accomplishments and budget goals for the next biennium. WCD asked the committee to approve a budget that would add staff members to our modernization

team and allow us to continue the progress we have made on the Workers' Compensation Information System (WCIS) modernization project. We were asked to return to the subcommittee in May to give an update on WCIS and our tentative timeline for implementation.

The Oregon Legislature passed DCBS' budget bill, [Senate Bill 5511](#), including the limitation requested for WCD's Modernization Program. The division is grateful for the support we received during this process from our customers and external partners.

This session, there were a few bills that affect Oregon's workers' compensation system, including two bills from WCD: [House Bill \(HB\) 2800](#) and [HB 2802](#).

Read more about the legislative updates in our [full article](#).

Premium rate study update

Last June, the DCBS research team released its biennial premium rate ranking study, and Oregon continues to have some of the lowest workers' compensation premium rates in the nation.

What makes Oregon's workers' compensation system truly effective is that our low premium rates are not achieved by cutting corners on worker benefits. Oregon continues to demonstrate that it is possible to maintain strong benefits for workers while keeping insurance rates affordable for employers.

DCBS has released this nationally recognized study every two years since 1986 — when Oregon ranked among the most expensive states in the nation for workers' compensation premiums.

You can read the full press release on [our website](#). ■





Katie Bruns

Meet the new deputy administrator: Katie Bruns

In April, Katie Bruns was appointed deputy administrator of the Workers' Compensation Division (WCD). She is eager to build on the foundation of experience and hard work Katie has amassed through 18 years in the workers' compensation industry, including 13 years with WCD.

Katie's previous roles at the division include auditor, vocational reviewer, policy analyst, and — most recently — Employer Compliance Unit manager, a role she held for the past four years. Her understanding of the division's operations and mission, as well as her ability to build strong relationships, positions her well to help shape WCD's future.

Outside of work, Katie does yoga every day, enjoys exploring Oregon wineries, and has just recently discovered the joy of stand-up paddle boarding.

"I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity and all the support I have received every step of my career with WCD," she said. "I've learned so much here and look forward to learning more, continuing to grow, and working alongside amazing people to bring our mission and vision to life."

Katie's appointment reflects WCD's ongoing commitment to experienced leadership and internal advancement, marking a new chapter in the division's mission to ensure an equitable workers' compensation system for all. ■



WORKERS'
COMPENSATION

Legislative highlights from the 2025 session

By Teri Watson, Legislative Coordinator.

The 2025 Oregon legislative session has wrapped up, and several new laws will affect Oregon workers and the Workers' Compensation Division (WCD). Here is a summary of recently passed bills:



Teri Watson

House Bill 2800

HB 2800 updates the statute for worker leasing companies and uses modern terms for professional employer organizations (PEOs). The statutory changes will close the gaps that will allow electronic reporting.

Effective date: While the bill officially takes effect 91 days after the end of the 2025 legislative session, its operative date is July 1, 2027. WCD is working internally on drafting rule language and will work with stakeholders as the rulemaking develops. Aaron Fellman is the author of this bill.

House Bill 2802

HB 2802 updates the statute when insurers must

pay permanent partial disability benefits in a lump sum. This bill resulted from a 2023 Oregon Court of Appeals case, *Giltner v. SAIF Corporation*, and applies to claims in which a closure notice is issued on or after Jan. 1, 2026. WCD is developing rule language and will work with stakeholders as the rulemaking develops. Summer Tucker is the author of this bill.

Effective date: Jan. 1, 2026.

House Bill 2236

HB 2236 requires PEOs to choose whether they or their client company will act as the official employer for unemployment insurance purposes.

Effective date: The bill takes effect 91 days after the end of the legislative session, two years before the main provisions of HB 2800 in 2027. As a result, Oregon Employment Department law will refer to worker leasing companies as PEOs before Oregon Revised Statute chapter 656 does.

House Bill 2799

HB 2799 raises the maximum amount allowed for witness fees, expenses, and other claim costs to \$3,500, unless the claimant demonstrates extraordinary circumstances justifying payment of a greater amount. The limit will increase

annually based on changes to the state average weekly wage.

Effective date: Jan. 1, 2026.

Senate Bill 904

SB 904 updates the statute to allow public school districts with self-insurance to apply for an exemption from the security deposit like other public employers. Five districts will be able to apply for this exemption through the WCD administrator. WCD will develop rules with stakeholders to assist with this process for the self-insured public school districts to ask for the exemption.

Effective date: Jan. 1, 2026.

Senate Bill 5511

SB 5511 is the budget bill for the Department of Consumer and Business Services, and it includes WCD funding and the Modernization Program policy option package request. The bill supports three permanent staff positions, continued information technology (IT) contractor support, new IT contracts for 2025-27, and independent quality management services oversight.

Effective date: July 1, 2025. ■

Modernization update

By Heather Williamson, Modernization Program manager.



Heather Williamson

The Modernization Program has made significant strides toward its goals during the second half of 2025, building on the work done earlier in the year.

The following is an update

on the state of the program, what it is currently working on, and what lies ahead in the future.

The Workers' Compensation Division's Modernization project, the Workers' Compensation Information System (WCIS), received a stage gate 2 endorsement from Enterprise Information Services (EIS) on May 30. This is a major milestone for both the program and the division. A significant amount of time and effort went into developing, revising, and finalizing the 16 project documents required for the stage gate.

The stage gate process was developed to support government agencies in managing large information technology projects. It is a formal review held at specific points in a project's life cycle to help manage risk, monitor changes in scope, and keep the people involved informed and engaged. These gates align loosely with typical project phases. Each one includes required documentation that must be approved before moving to the next stage.

There are four stage gates in this model. The first is the initiation stage gate, which requires a business case that explains why the project is needed and what the expected outcomes are, and includes a project charter. We received a stage gate 1 endorsement for the core system implementation project in March 2023. However, last fall, we combined the core system implementation and the functional modules into one project, called the WCIS, for better efficiency and cost savings. This change required a repeat of stage gate 1. WCIS was endorsed at stage gate 1 on Feb. 5, 2025, and stage gate 2 on May 30.

With these endorsements in place, we can now seek final approval to launch the request for proposal (RFP) process. The next step is stage gate 3, which focuses on implementation planning, and is required before we can sign contracts with the selected vendor. Stage gate 4 marks the project close.

We are aiming to launch the RFP in July and complete negotiations by the end of this year. If all goes as planned, we will bring a solutions vendor on board in early 2026 to begin implementation.

As the Modernization Program moves closer to implementation, we will send updates more often. You are encouraged to sign up for updates through GovDelivery or visit the [Modernization Program webpage](#) for the latest news. ■



Recognizing the Appellate Service Team's work in the Medical Arbiter Program



Much of the work done by the Workers' Compensation Division (WCD) goes unnoticed, yet it is carried out by dedicated professionals who help maintain Oregon's fair-compensation system.

One team deserving special recognition is the Appellate Service Team (AST), part of the Appellate Review Unit. Internally, it is known as the arbiter scheduling team and consists of Appellate Service Representatives **Liz Shackelford, Francis Starling, and Christy Watson-Husky.**

Responsibilities of AST

AST plays a crucial role in ensuring the integrity of medical arbiter examinations within the workers' compensation system. Its primary responsibilities include:

- Scheduling post-claim-closure medical exams.
- Coordinating with attorneys, insurers, injured workers, doctors, and staff members to arrange examinations, including securing interpreters when needed and handling rescheduling.
- Communicating examination details to those involved.

- Ensuring physicians have the appropriate medical records and questions prepared by the appellate review specialist.

Focus on Medical Arbiter Program recruitment

Recently, AST has been focused on recruiting physicians for the Medical Arbiter Program. This program consists of medical professionals who conduct impartial examinations of injured workers. Medical arbiters are an important part of WCD's review process when there is a dispute regarding a claim closure. The Appellate Review Unit oversees this process, known as reconsideration, and may request an impartial medical exam as part of the review.

Addressing recruitment challenges

The number of available medical arbiters has been falling, especially in specialized fields outside of Portland. This shortage presents challenges in serving all Oregonians, particularly those in rural areas. Additionally, many existing arbiters are nearing retirement or reducing the number of exams they perform.

Recruitment goals

AST is focused not only on increasing the number of arbiters, but also on ensuring that a diverse group of medical professionals is available to serve injured workers across Oregon. Qualified medical arbiters must hold a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO), must be licensed by, and in good standing with, the Oregon Medical Board, and may specialize in fields such as:

- Physical medicine
- Occupational medicine
- Orthopedic surgery
- Psychiatry

Recruitment efforts and achievements

To improve recruitment, a project team was formed to improve outreach and communication strategies. The project team, led by Medical Reviewer **Steph Doster**, included Performance and Project Portfolio Coordinator **Olivia Xiong-Vang**, Appellate Review Specialist **Sara Claessens**, and AST members as subject matter experts. The team developed new recruitment materials, email templates, and phone scripts

to optimize communication. Its outreach efforts have included cold-calling physicians and attending conferences.

Since fall 2024, AST team members have attended three conferences, with additional events planned for 2025. Their efforts have resulted in:

- Potential partnerships with two orthopedic clinics (12-plus doctors), and an occupational rehabilitation center (two psychologists).
- The onboarding of 15 new medical arbiters – including four psychiatrists; two occupational medicine providers; one ear, nose, and throat specialist; and a psychologist specializing in neuropsychological evaluations. This 38 percent increase brings the total number of arbiters from 40 to 55.

Get involved

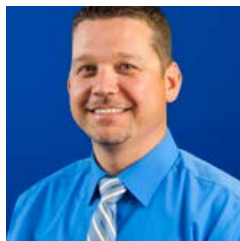
We are still in need of arbiter physicians. If you or someone you know is ready to make a positive effect on Oregon's workers' compensation system and interested in becoming a medical arbiter, please reach out. AST continues to seek dedicated professionals to help ensure fair and efficient workers' compensation reviews across Oregon. You can find more information on becoming a medical arbiter on our [Medical Arbiter Program webpage](#). ■



Updates to WCD strategic plan

By Matt West, WCD administrator.

WCD is delighted to share its new three-year strategic plan and updated mission, vision, and values.



Matt West

In 2017, the division introduced its 10-year “Strategic House,” and while we’ve made some minor changes to it over the years, we realized that the plan did not reflect the critical strategic work we are doing around modernization. Over the past year, we have spent time working hard to update our goals, strategies, and tactics with that in mind. This focus helps ensure we are working on the right things to support the Oregon workers’ compensation system.

The updates keep most of the important work from the original plan. We added strategies to complete the last three years with a focus on modernization.

Our five areas of focus are:

- People and culture
- Operations and structure
- Modernization
- Regulatory approach

■ External relationships

We updated our **mission, vision, and values** to better reflect our strategic plan goals.

Mission: We ensure an equitable workers’ compensation system for all.

Vision: We are a nationally recognized workers’ compensation system that provides accessibility and ease of use for all.

Values:

- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging: We encourage and value all perspectives.
- Accountability: We serve ethically and responsibly.
- Integrity: We tell the truth and honor commitments.
- Service: We build positive relationships and work together to improve outcomes.

We have built these values in to every part of our plan, which is in alignment with the DCBS strategic plan. Our strategic plan helps fulfill our mission and vision, and we’re excited to share our progress with you over the next three years.

You can read the full strategic plan on our [website](#). ■

WCD Three-Year Strategic Plan

Mission:






We ensure an equitable workers’ compensation system for all.

Vision:

We are a nationally recognized workers’ compensation system that provides accessibility and ease of use for all.

Values:

- **Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging:** We encourage and value all perspectives.
- **Accountability:** We serve ethically and responsibly.
- **Integrity:** We tell the truth and honor commitments.
- **Service:** We build positive relationships and work together to improve outcomes.

 People & Culture	<p>We provide opportunities that support continuous employee development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure performance expectations and measurements are clear to all WCD team members Solicit and respond to employee input Ensure our workforce has the skill sets to perform the changing work of the division <p>Our workforce is diverse and reflects the Oregonians we serve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intentionally promote a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture of belonging Hire a diverse workforce
 Operations & Structure	<p>We have the structure in place to continuously analyze and improve processes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and address areas for improvement proactively Prioritize internal resources to support critical projects and business needs Ensure commitment to helping our team members through change Implement performance scorecard measures and use them to make decisions and improve processes
 Modernization	<p>Our team members have the materials and equipment they need to do their work efficiently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve interaction in the hybrid work environment <p>We support future business needs by implementing modern technology and transforming business processes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Workers’ Compensation Information System (WCIS)
 Regulatory Approach	<p>Our regulatory approach is effective, balanced, and promotes voluntary compliance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a proactive regulatory approach to identify and address areas for improvement Streamline divisionwide processes to address identified regulatory issues and trends Expand opportunities to incentivize compliance
 External Relationships	<p>We collaborate and engage with our customers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively engage with underrepresented and underserved communities that are affected by our services Provide effective education and outreach Improve accessibility for and service delivery to external customers through modernization

Don't miss the 22nd Oregon Workers' Compensation Educational Conference – May 7-8, 2026



The 22nd Oregon Workers' Compensation Educational Conference will take place on May 7-8, 2026, at the Holiday Inn Portland – I-5 South in Wilsonville.

This in-person event will provide valuable insights into Oregon's workers' compensation system, featuring expert-led discussions, industry-networking opportunities, and continuing education credits.

Event details

When: Thursday, May 7, 2026 (8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)
and Friday, May 8, 2026 (8 a.m. – noon)

Where: Holiday Inn Portland – I-5 South
(Wilsonville), 25425 SW 95th Ave., Wilsonville, OR
97070

Registration: Opens summer of 2025

Cost and registration

Early bird rate: \$350 (valid until April 1, 2026)

Regular rate: \$425 (effective April 1, 2026)



For exhibitor or sponsor-related inquiries, contact [Jennifer Ferris](#).

Who should attend

This conference is designed for professionals across the workers' compensation industry, including:

- Employers
- Attorneys
- Safety and human resource managers
- Insurers and third-party administrators
- Self-insured employers
- Workers and union representatives
- Medical providers and service providers
- Vocational and physical rehabilitation providers

- Others with an interest in Oregon's workers' compensation system

What to expect

Attendees can get up to nine hours of continuing education credits with more than 25 unique classes to choose from. The conference will include:

- Breakfast and lunch on the first day, followed by an after-conference mixer
- Continental breakfast and snacks on the second day
- Free parking for all attendees
- An exhibitor hall featuring industry professionals sharing insights on workers' compensation
- Opportunities to network with WCD staff and leading experts in the field

Featured sessions

The conference will cover key topics such as:

- Case law updates
- Workers' compensation basics collaboration
- Oregon's return-to-work programs and their benefits for employers, insurers, and injured workers
- Legislative updates on Oregon workers' compensation policies
- Progress on the WCD Modernization program
- Additional industry-focused discussions

This event offers a unique opportunity for professionals to engage with industry leaders, gain valuable knowledge, and strengthen their understanding of Oregon's workers' compensation system. ■