

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2022 REGULAR SESSION

Committee Substitute

for

Senate Bill 543

BY SENATORS ROBERTS, TARR, WOODRUM, BALDWIN,

SMITH, AND JEFFRIES

[Originating in the Committee on the Judiciary;

reported on February 8, 2022]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section,
2 designated §21A-10-23, relating to authorizing the Commissioner of Workforce West
3 Virginia to create an Unemployment Compensation Insurance Fraud Unit; establishing
4 training and experience requirements; specifying duties; granting certain authorities
5 necessary to conduct investigations into alleged unemployment insurance fraud;
6 authorizing certain personnel to operate a state vehicle and carry a firearm; establishing
7 training requirements for carrying a firearm; and exempting the Unemployment
8 Compensation Fraud Unit from the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act and
9 the Open Government Proceedings Act.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 10. GENERAL PROVISIONS.

**§21A-10-23. Creation of Unemployment Compensation Insurance Fraud Unit; purpose;
duties; and personnel qualifications.**

1 (a) There is hereby established the West Virginia Unemployment Compensation
2 Insurance Fraud Unit within the offices of the commissioner. The commissioner may employ full-
3 time supervisory, legal, and investigative personnel for the unit who shall be qualified by training
4 and experience in the areas of detection, investigation, or prosecution of fraud within and against
5 the unemployment compensation system. The director of the unit is a full-time position and shall
6 be appointed by the commissioner and serve at his or her will and pleasure. The director shall be
7 a certified fraud investigator with experience in computer technology. The commissioner shall
8 provide office space, equipment, and supplies, and shall employ and train personnel, including
9 legal counsel, investigators, auditors, and clerical staff necessary for the unit to carry out its duties
10 and responsibilities under this article as the commissioner determines is necessary.

11 (b) The unit shall:

12 (1) Initiate inquiries and conduct investigations when the unit has reasonable cause to
13 believe violations of any provisions of chapter 21A of this code, West Virginia Unemployment
14 Compensation Insurance Law are occurring, or have occurred;

15 (2) Review reports or complaints of alleged fraud related to the business of unemployment
16 compensation insurance activities from federal, state, and local law-enforcement and regulatory
17 agencies, persons engaged in the business of insurance, and the general public to determine
18 whether the reports require further investigation;

19 (3) Conduct independent examinations of alleged fraudulent activity related to the
20 business of unemployment compensation insurance and undertake independent studies to
21 determine the extent of fraudulent insurance acts; and

22 (4) Perform any other duties related to the purposes of this article assigned to it by the
23 commissioner.

24 (c) The unit may:

25 (1) Inspect, copy, or collect records and evidence;

26 (2) Serve subpoenas issued pursuant to §21A-2-21 of this code;

27 (3) Administer oaths and affirmations;

28 (4) Share records and evidence with federal, state, or local law-enforcement or regulatory
29 agencies, and enter into interagency agreements. For purposes of carrying out investigations
30 under this article, the unit shall be considered a criminal justice agency under all federal and state
31 laws, regulations, and rules and as such shall have access to any information that is available to
32 other criminal justice agencies concerning violations of the unemployment compensation
33 insurance laws of West Virginia or related criminal laws;

34 (5) Make criminal referrals to the county prosecutors; and

35 (6) Conduct investigations outside this state. If the information the unit seeks to obtain is
36 located outside this state, the person from whom the information is sought may make the
37 information available to the unit to examine at the place where the information is located. The unit

38 may designate representatives, including officials of the state in which the matter is located, to
39 inspect the information on behalf of the unit, and may respond to similar requests from officials of
40 other states.

41 (d) Specific personnel of the unit designated by the commissioner may operate vehicles
42 owned or leased for the state displaying Class A registration plates.

43 (e) Notwithstanding any provision of this code to the contrary, specific personnel of the
44 unit designated by the commissioner may carry firearms in the course of their official duties after
45 meeting specialized qualifications established by the Governor's Committee on Crime,
46 Delinquency, and Correction, which shall include the successful completion of handgun training
47 provided to law-enforcement officers by the West Virginia State Police: *Provided*, That nothing in
48 this subsection shall be construed to include any person designated by the commissioner as a
49 law-enforcement officer as that term is defined by the provisions of §30-29-1 of this code.

50 (f) The unit is not subject to the provisions of §6-9A-1 *et seq.* of this code, and the
51 investigations conducted by the unit and the materials placed in the files of the unit as a result of
52 any investigation are exempt from public disclosure under the provisions of §29B-1-1 *et seq.* of
53 this code.