

Chapter 7.75 RCW

Dispute resolution centers

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Notes:

Mediation testimony competency: RCW 5.60.070 and 5.60.072.

7.75.010

Legislative findings and intent.

(1) The legislature finds and declares that:

(a) The resolution of many disputes can be costly and complex in a judicial setting where the parties involved are necessarily in an adversary posture and subject to formalized procedures; and

(b) Alternative dispute resolution centers can meet the needs of Washington's citizens by providing forums in which persons may voluntarily participate in the resolution of disputes in an informal and less adversarial atmosphere.

(2) It is the intent of the legislature that programs established pursuant to this chapter:

(a) Stimulate the establishment and use of dispute resolution centers to help meet the need for alternatives to the courts for the resolution of certain disputes.

(b) Encourage continuing community participation in the development, administration, and oversight of local programs designed to facilitate the informal resolution of disputes between and among members of the community.

(c) Offer structures for dispute resolution which may serve as models for resolution centers in other communities.

(d) Serve a specific community or locale and resolve disputes that arise within that community or locale.

(e) Educate the community on ways of using the services of the neighborhood dispute resolution center directly and in a preventive capacity.

7.75.020

Dispute resolution center — Creation — Plan — Approval by county or municipality.

(1) A dispute resolution center may be created and operated by a municipality, county, or by a corporation organized exclusively for the resolution of disputes or for charitable or educational purposes. The corporation shall not be organized for profit, and no part of the net earnings may inure to the benefit of any private shareholders or individuals. The majority of the directors of such a corporation shall not consist of members of any single profession.

(2) A dispute resolution center may not begin operation under this chapter until a plan for establishing a center for the mediation and settlement of disputes has been approved by the legislative authority of the municipality or county creating the center or, in the case of a center operated by a nonprofit corporation, by the legislative authority of the municipality or county within which the center will be located. A plan for a dispute resolution center shall not be approved and the center shall not begin operation until the legislative authority finds that the plan adequately prescribes:

(a) Procedures for filing requests for dispute resolution services with the center and for scheduling mediation sessions participated in by the parties to the dispute;

(b) Procedures to ensure that each dispute mediated by the center meets the criteria for appropriateness for mediation set by the legislative authority and for rejecting disputes which do not meet the criteria;

(c) Procedures for giving notice of the time, place, and nature of the mediation session to the parties, and for conducting mediation sessions that comply with the provisions of this chapter;

(d) Procedures which ensure that participation by all parties is voluntary;

(e) Procedures for obtaining referrals from public and private bodies;

(f) Procedures for meeting the particular needs of the participants, including, but not limited to, providing services at times convenient to the participants, in sign language, and in languages other than English;

(g) Procedures for providing trained and certified mediators who, during the dispute resolution process, shall make no decisions or determinations of the issues involved, but who shall facilitate negotiations by the participants themselves to achieve a voluntary resolution of the issues; and

(h) Procedures for informing and educating the community about the dispute resolution center and encouraging the use of the center's services in appropriate cases.

7.75.030

Services to be provided without charge or for fee based on ability to pay.

A dispute resolution center established under this chapter shall provide dispute resolution services either without charge to the participants or for a fee which is based on the participant's ability to pay.

7.75.035

Surcharge by county legislative authority.

(1) A county legislative authority may impose a surcharge of up to ten dollars on each civil filing fee in district court and a surcharge of up to fifteen dollars on each filing fee for small claims actions for the purpose of funding dispute resolution centers established under this chapter.

(2) Any surcharge imposed shall be collected by the clerk of the court and remitted to the county treasurer for deposit in a separate account to be used solely for dispute resolution centers established under this chapter. Money received under this section is not subject to RCW 3.62.020(2) or 3.62.090. The accounts created pursuant to this subsection shall be audited by the state auditor in accordance with RCW 43.09.260.

7.75.040

Dispute resolution agreement required — When admissible as evidence.

(1) In conducting a dispute resolution process, a center established under this chapter shall require:

(a) That the disputing parties enter into a written agreement which expresses the method by which they shall attempt to resolve the issues in dispute; and

(b) That at the conclusion of the dispute resolution process, the parties enter into a written agreement which sets forth the settlement of the issues and the future responsibilities, if any, of each party.

(2) A written agreement entered into with the assistance of a center at the conclusion of the written dispute resolution process is admissible as evidence in any judicial or administrative proceeding.

7.75.050

Confidentiality of centers' files, etc. — Exception — Privileged communications.

Regardless of any provision to the contrary in chapter 42.17 RCW, all memoranda, work notes or products, or case files of centers established under this chapter are confidential and privileged and are not subject to disclosure in any judicial or administrative proceeding unless the court or administrative tribunal determines that the materials were submitted by a participant to the center for the purpose of avoiding discovery of the material in a subsequent proceeding. In all other respects, chapter 7.07 RCW, shall govern the privilege and confidentiality to be accorded to communications made in conjunction with a mediation conducted by a dispute resolution center established under this chapter.

7.75.060

Withdrawal from dispute resolution process.

Any person who voluntarily enters a dispute resolution process at a center established under this chapter may revoke his or her consent, withdraw from dispute resolution, and seek judicial or administrative redress prior to reaching a written resolution agreement. The withdrawal shall be in writing. No legal penalty, sanction, or restraint may be imposed upon the person.

7.75.070

Center may seek and expend funds.

A dispute resolution center established under this chapter may seek and accept contributions from counties and municipalities, agencies of the state and federal governments, private sources, and any other available funds, and may expend the funds to carry out the purposes of this chapter.

7.75.080

Statutes of limitations tolled until dispute resolution process concluded.

Any applicable statute of limitations shall be tolled as to participants in dispute resolution at a center established under this chapter during the period which begins with the date of the participants' execution of the written agreement required by RCW [7.75.040\(1\)\(a\)](#) and ends on the date that a written agreement at the conclusion of the dispute resolution process is executed under RCW [7.75.040\(1\)\(b\)](#) or a participant's written notice of withdrawal from the dispute resolution process is executed under RCW [7.75.060](#).

7.75.090

Application of chapter.

Nothing in this chapter precludes any person or persons not operating under RCW [7.75.020](#) from providing dispute resolution services. However, the provisions of RCW [7.75.050](#), relating to confidentiality, and RCW [7.75.080](#), relating to statutes of limitation, apply only to proceedings conducted by a dispute resolution center established under this chapter.

7.75.100

Immunity from civil action.

(1) Members of the board of directors of a dispute resolution center are immune from suit in any civil action based upon any proceedings or other official acts performed in good faith as members of the board.

(2) Employees and volunteers of a dispute resolution center are immune from suit in any civil action based on any proceedings or other official acts performed in their capacity as employees or volunteers, except in cases of wilful or wanton misconduct.

(3) A dispute resolution center is immune from suit in any civil action based on any of its proceedings or other official acts performed by its employees, volunteers, or members or its board of directors, except (a) in cases of wilful or wanton misconduct by its employees or volunteers, and (b) in cases of official acts performed in bad faith by members of its board.