



Bill gives public more access to agency meetings

MAY, 4 2009
ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Nevada Assembly panel was urged Monday to pass a Senate-approved plan to ensure open meeting laws are followed by government agencies when they revise their regulations.

The Assembly Government Affairs Committee heard testimony on SB267, which requires the Legislative Commission to either OK or object to an agency's rule changes. Currently, such regulations become effective unless specifically rejected by the commission.

Sen. Valerie Wiener, D-Las Vegas, primary sponsor of SB267, said the measure ensures that such regulations actually comply with legislative intent. She said studies showed that in the past many agencies adopted rules that didn't meet legislative goals.

"I presumed that once we worked a bill through both houses and we worked out the kinks and it got signed into law that everything went forward according to plan," Wiener said, adding that she doubted agencies acted in "bad faith" when rules didn't necessarily match bill purposes.

SB267 also would require public access to workshops and hearings of public agencies, along with meetings which already are open to the public. Documents relating to regulations also would have to be available to the public at meetings. Currently, such documents are available upon request.

Cheryl Blomstrom, representing the Nevada Manufacturers Association, supported the measure, saying, "This bill marries the letter of the law to the spirit of the law in a very nice way."

Jeanette Belz of the Nevada Chapter of Associated General Contractors also endorsed the bill, saying it provides the public with more information needed to understand a regulation's impact.

"Often the very heavy lifting is done in the workshop setting when you are actually just discussing how a regulation is going to get formulated," Belz said. "It's shocking to me that that wouldn't be subject to public notice."

Belz also said the short amount of time that the Legislature actually meets makes the bill particularly important.

"Now that we're limited to 120 days, it seems like over time the amount of policy that actually gets relegated to the development of regulations has increased phenomenally. So we've noticed that so many more bills are worked out in regulation," Belz said.

Luke Busby, assistant general counsel for the state Public Utilities Commission, said he was neutral on SB267, although wording requiring rule adoption within a particular time period could be "problematic."

"Because we can't quantify the period of time, we can't tell the Legislature how long it will take to implement certain statutory requirements," Busby said.

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