



Snohomish County Council

Committee: COW, Admin

ECAF: 21-0936

Proposal: Mot. 21-406

Report by: Geoffrey Thomas
Chief of Staff

Date: 11/15/21

Consideration

Motion 21-406, presented for councilmembers' consideration, re-appoints Jill McKinnie as Snohomish County's public advocate to a 2-year term, which would commence on January 1, 2022 and expire on December 31, 2023.

Background

Office of Public Advocate - Establishment & Scope

Chapter 2.11 of the Snohomish County Code establishes the Office of the Public Advocate. The Office was required by an amendment to the Snohomish County Charter in 2016.¹ The Office of Public Advocate replaced the Office of the Ombudsman.²

The public advocate functions independently and is subject to administrative direction by the Snohomish County Council's chairperson or chief of staff. The public advocate receives, investigates, and makes recommendations to the council and appropriate county agencies on complaints related to the operation of county government. The public advocate responds to inquires from the public about the operation of county government.³ Sections 2.11.100 through -130 provide detailed information related to the powers and responsibilities of the public advocate.⁴

Appointing and Reappointing a Public Advocate

When there is a vacancy in the position of public advocate, the county executive nominates two people who meet qualifications found in SCC 2.11.060 to the county council. The council either appoints one of those two nominees or may appoint another person if the council finds that the executive's nominees do not qualify to serve in the position.⁵

A newly appointed public advocate serves for one, 1-year term after which the county council may reappoint the public advocate to 2-year terms. Council's consideration to

¹ Snohomish County Charter Section 2.160. Link: <https://snohomish.county.codes/Charter/2.160>

² Ord. No. 17-024, (05/17/17). Link: <https://snohomish.county.codes/SCC/2.11>

³ SCC 2.11.010. Link: <https://snohomish.county.codes/SCC/2.11.010>

⁴ SEE sections beginning at link: <https://snohomish.county.codes/SCC/2.11.100>

⁵ SCC 2.11.040. Link: <https://snohomish.county.codes/SCC/2.11.040>

reappoint a public advocate does not require a recommendation from the executive. There is not a limit to the number of terms to which the council can reappoint a public advocate.⁶ Section 2.11.070 provides that a public advocate may be removed from service during a term by motion by a minimum of four affirmative votes.

Current Public Advocate

Jill McKinnie serves as Snohomish County's public advocate in a term expiring on December 31, 2021. Jill McKinnie served as Snohomish County's ombud before the Office of the Ombudsman was replaced by the Office of the Public Advocate. Her service as the ombud began on March 30, 2015 and was continued by reappointment on March 28, 2016.⁷

Ms. McKinnie met the qualifications to serve as Snohomish County's public advocate and began service in an initial 1-year term in that role on January 1, 2017. Council has since reappointed Ms. McKinnie to two, 2-year terms as public advocate by Motion 17-378 and Motion 19-404. The term within which Ms. McKinnie is currently serving expires on December 31, 2021.

Current Proposal

Scope: Motion 21-406, presented for councilmembers' consideration, re-appoints Jill McKinnie as Snohomish County's public advocate to a 2-year term.

Duration: The 2-year term would begin January 1, 2022 and expire December 31, 2023.

Fiscal Implications: None.

2021 Budget: The proposed motion would not impact the 2021 Budget.

Future Budget Impacts: The proposed motion would not impact future budgets.

Handling: Normal.

Approved as to form: N/A.

Risk Management: N/A.

Executive Recommendation: N/A – The process of reappointing a public advocate is within the legislative branch only.

Request: Council's consideration to approve the proposed motion to reappoint Jill McKinnie as Snohomish County's public advocate.

⁶ SCC 2.11.050. Link: <https://snohomish.county.codes/SCC/2.11.050>

⁷ Motion 15-121 and Motion 16-149.