

44-555c. Workers compensation appeals board; jurisdiction; composition and appointment; reappointment; term of office; qualifications, salary and expenses; panels; final orders, content and issuance. (a) There is hereby established the workers compensation appeals board. Whenever the workers compensation board, or words of like effect, is referred to or designated by a statute, contract or other document, such reference or designation shall be deemed to apply to the workers compensation appeals board. The board shall have exclusive jurisdiction to review all decisions, findings, orders and awards of compensation of administrative law judges under the workers compensation act. The review by the appeals board shall be upon questions of law and fact as presented and shown by a transcript of the evidence and the proceedings as presented, had and introduced before the administrative law judge. The appeals board shall be within the division of workers compensation of the department of labor and all budgeting, personnel, purchasing and related management functions of the board shall be administered under the supervision and direction of the secretary of labor. The appeals board shall consist of five members who shall be appointed by the secretary in accordance with this section and who shall each serve for a term of four years.

(b) Each board member shall be an attorney regularly admitted to practice law in Kansas for a period of at least seven years with at least five years experience practicing law in the area of workers compensation and shall have engaged in the active practice of law during such period as a lawyer, judge of a court of record or any court in Kansas or a full-time teacher of law in an accredited law school, or any combination of such types of practice.

(c) Each board member shall receive an annual salary in an amount equal to the salary prescribed by law for a district judge, except that the member who is the chairperson of the workers compensation board shall receive an annual salary in an amount equal to the salary prescribed for a district judge designated as chief judge of a district court of Kansas. The board members shall devote full time to the duties of such office and shall not engage in the private practice of law during their term of office. No board member may receive additional compensation for official services performed by the board member. Each board member shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the performance of such official duties under the same circumstances and to the same extent as judges of the district court are reimbursed for such expenses.

(d) Applications for membership on the board shall be submitted to the director of workers compensation. The director shall determine if an applicant meets the qualifications for membership on the board prescribed in subsection (b). Qualified applicants for the board will be submitted by the director to the workers compensation and employment security boards nominating committee for consideration.

(e) Each member of the board shall hold office for the term of the appointment and until the successor shall have been appointed. Successors to such members shall be appointed for terms of four years.

(f) A board member who wishes to be considered for reappointment shall be deemed to have met the qualification requirements for appointment as a board member. If a board member wishes to be considered for reappointment by the workers compensation and employment security boards nominating committee, such board member shall submit an application as provided in subsection (d) no sooner than 150 days before and no later than 90 days prior to the expiration of such member's term. No later than thirty days prior to the expiration of the term, the nominating committee shall convene to vote on the reappointment of the board member. The board member shall be submitted to the secretary for reappointment unless 2/3 of the nominating committee votes not to submit the board member's name for reappointment.

(g) The members of the board shall annually elect one member to serve as chairperson.

(h) If illness or other temporary disability of a member of the board will not permit the member to serve during a case or in any case in which a member of the board must be excused from serving because of a conflict or is otherwise disqualified with regard to such case, the director shall appoint a member pro tem. Each member pro tem shall receive compensation at the same rate as a member of the board receives, prorated for the hours of actual service as a member pro tem and shall receive expenses under the same circumstances and to the same extent as a member of the board receives. Each member pro tem shall have all the powers, duties and functions of a member of the board with regard to the case.

(i) The board shall maintain principal offices in Topeka, Kansas, and the board may conduct hearings at a courthouse of any county in Kansas or at another location specified by the board. The secretary of labor shall provide a courtroom and other suitable quarters in Topeka, Kansas, for the use of the board and its staff. When the board conducts hearings at any location other than in Topeka, Kansas, the director shall make suitable arrangements for such hearings. Subject to the provisions of appropriation acts, the director shall provide such supplies and equipment and shall appoint such support personnel as may be necessary for the board to fulfill the duties imposed by this act, subject to approval by the secretary.

(j) For purposes of hearing cases, the board may sit together or in panels of two members or more, designated by the chairperson of the board, except that an appeal from a preliminary award entered under K.S.A. 44-534a, and amendments thereto, may be heard by a panel of one member designated by the chairperson. All members of the board shall determine each matter before the board. All decisions, reviews and determinations by the board shall be approved in writing by at least three board members. Whenever the board enters a final order in any proceeding, the board shall make written findings of fact and conclusions of law forming the basis of the board's determination and final order. The findings of fact and conclusions of law of the board shall be made a part of the final order. The board shall mail a copy of the final order of the board to all parties to the proceeding within three days following the issuance of the final order.

History: L. 1995, ch. 1, § 1; L. 1997, ch. 125, § 13; L. 1999, ch. 57, § 47; L. 2004, ch. 179, § 18; L. 2013, ch. 104, § 2; Apr. 25.