

News Advisory

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



25th anniversary event will observe 1992 historic reforms of Rhode Island's workers' compensation system

May 12, 2017: Twenty-five years after critically needed legislation swept through and reformed the state's workers' compensation system, state and federal officials and labor leaders will gather and look back to see how it has all worked out.

On May 19, the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court and the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Advisory Council will host a 25th anniversary observation at the Providence Biltmore hotel from 9 to 11 a.m. The gathering will be in L'Apogee on the 18th floor.

“In 1992, legislation was enacted which transformed our failing workers' compensation system into one of the best in the country,” said Robert M. Ferrieri, chief judge of the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court. “I invite people to join Rhode Island's leaders as we celebrate the unmitigated success of those reforms in a morning of reflection and recognition.”

The 1992 Workers' Compensation Reform Act addressed a workers' compensation system that was in a crisis of waste, abuse and poor service to legitimately injured workers. Reforms of 1990 did not go far enough to protect the fiscal health and stability of the overall workers' compensation system. The 1992 Act provided additional incentives for insurers to adequately and vigorously manage their cases; to swiftly and fairly identify employees who were no longer disabled and remove them from the system; to motivate workers to return to gainful employment; to motivate employers to reinstate injured workers; to improve the safety of the workplace, and to assure that all participants conduct themselves with integrity.

The 1992 Act addressed benefit formulas, earnings capacity, collection limits, lump sum settlements, medical review protocols, choice of health-care providers, anti-fraud provisions, frivolous petitions, and creation of a risk pool, and transformed the Beacon Mutual Insurance Company.

State and federal officials and labor leaders are expected to attend the anniversary celebration. Among those expected to give remarks are U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, who as state director of business regulation in 1992 oversaw the reforms; U.S. Sen. Jack Reed; Governor Raimondo; House Speaker Nicholas A. Mattiello; Senate President Dominick J. Ruggiero; Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell, and Workers' Compensation Court Chief Judge Ferrieri.

Senator Whitehouse is expected to address why the reforms were necessary, while retired Workers' Compensation Court Chief Judge George E. Healy Jr., Laborers' International Union General Secretary Armand E. Sabitoni and AFL-CIO President George Nee will speak to the substance of the reforms. Chief Judge Ferrieri will then critique how the reforms have stood the test of time.

The Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court is a specialized court which has an important role in the lives of Rhode Island workers who are injured on the job. It deals with more than 8,000 petitions each year and has been recognized as a national model for the efficiency with which it handles the cases assigned to it. More than 70 percent of the disputes are resolved within one month of the date on which they are filed. A deserving worker who is unable to provide income for the family can obtain the benefits to which he or she is entitled as soon as possible after an injury and avoid financial disaster caused by an unnecessary delay.

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