

342.230 Employees of the Department of Workers' Claims -- Duties of commissioner -- Appointment, qualifications, terms, and duties of administrative law judges -- Exemption of administrative law judges from classified service -- Removal provisions -- Vacancies -- Chief administrative law judge.

- (1) The commissioner shall establish and fill any positions, including medical services and advice, necessary to carry on the department's work subject to the limits of appropriations for the department and except as otherwise required by law. All employees of the department shall be classified employees under KRS Chapter 18A, except for the commissioner, the administrative law judges, and board members. The commissioner shall have immediate supervision of the employees of the department, perform duties assigned to him or her, and have complete authority to carry out all the administrative functions relating to the department.
- (2) The commissioner with the assistance of the board shall train and instruct the administrative law judges on an ongoing basis; assign cases; and monitor the caseloads of the administrative law judges and the Workers' Compensation Board to ensure timely disposition of cases; keep and be the custodian of the records of the board and the administrative law judges; annually report the activities of the board and the administrative law judges to the Governor; and devote his or her full time to the duties of his or her office. The commissioner shall be paid a salary not less than the salary of a member of the board.
- (3) The Governor shall appoint, with the consent of the Senate in accordance with KRS 11.160 for a term of four (4) years, not more than nineteen (19) administrative law judges, each of whom shall be an attorney and shall have five (5) years' experience in the Commonwealth in the practice of workers' compensation law or a related field, and extensive knowledge of workers' compensation law, and shall be paid the same salary as a Circuit Judge. Each newly appointed administrative law judge shall not assume his or her office until June 1 following confirmation by the Senate. Administrative law judges who are reappointed shall continue to serve in their capacity until the reappointment is confirmed by the Senate or the Senate adjourns without confirming the appointment. Each administrative law judge shall be exempt from the classified service, and his or her support staff may be exempt from the classified service. Each administrative law judge may be employed for additional terms with the consent of the Senate in accordance with KRS 11.160. The Governor, at least thirty (30) days prior to the expiration of a term of an administrative law judge, shall provide the name of the individual whom he or she intends to appoint to the position to the chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Economic Development, Tourism, and Labor. These administrative law judges shall conduct hearings, and otherwise supervise the presentation of evidence and perform any other duties assigned to them by statute and shall render final decisions, orders, or awards. Administrative law judges may, in receiving evidence, make rulings affecting the competency, relevancy, and materiality of the evidence about to be presented and upon motions presented during the taking of evidence as will expedite the preparation of the case.
- (4) To ensure that the administrative law judges perform their responsibilities

competently and issue decisions consistent with this chapter, the commissioner shall, at least twice annually, conduct training and education seminars in workers' compensation law; administrative law; and methods and procedures for writing well-reasoned, clear, correct, and concise opinions, orders, or awards.

- (5) The Governor may at any time remove the commissioner or any member of the board. The commissioner may remove any administrative law judge. A member of the board or an administrative law judge may be removed for good cause, including violation of the code of judicial ethics or the code of ethics applicable to the executive branch of the Commonwealth. In addition, an administrative law judge or a member of the board may be removed for the persistent or repeated failure to perform satisfactorily the specific duties assigned in this chapter, including the requirement of timely disposition of cases, review of attorney's fees, and failure to attend training and continuing education programs required by this section.
- (6) Any vacancy in the term of an administrative law judge, which occurs prior to the expiration of the term, shall be filled if necessary by appointment of the Governor in accordance with subsection (3) of this section within sixty (60) days from the date the vacancy occurs, with the consent of the Senate in accordance with KRS 11.160, for the remainder of the term. An administrative law judge appointed to fill an unexpired term shall immediately assume the office subject to the confirmation by the Senate in accordance with KRS 11.160 for the remainder of the term.
- (7) Any administrative law judge not currently pending confirmation by the Senate with a term expiring on or before:
 - (a) December 1, 2025, shall continue serving a term that shall expire on June 1, 2026;
 - (b) December 1, 2026, shall continue serving a term that shall expire on June 1, 2027;
 - (c) December 1, 2027, shall continue serving a term that shall expire on June 1, 2028; or
 - (d) December 1, 2028, shall continue serving a term that shall expire on June 1, 2029.
- (8) One (1) of the administrative law judges appointed pursuant to this section shall be appointed as a chief administrative law judge, to have the same qualifications, powers, duties, and requirements as those of other administrative law judges. The chief administrative law judge shall not be assigned regular dockets but shall instead assist the commissioner by doing all scheduling of the administrative law judges, handling dockets assigned to the administrative law judges in case of an emergency, providing supervision of the administrative law judges, and providing educational opportunities for the administrative law judges. The chief administrative law judge shall be paid at the same rate as the administrative law judges plus an additional three thousand dollars (\$3,000) per year. At any time the commissioner may replace the chief administrative law judge with one (1) of the other administrative law judges at which time the former chief administrative law judge shall resume the duties assigned to the other administrative law judges pursuant to this chapter. On January 1, 1998, the commissioner shall employ a person in this position for a four (4) year term.

Effective: April 9, 2026

History: Amended 2026 Ky. Acts ch. 61, sec. 7, effective April 9, 2026. -- Amended 2025 Ky. Acts ch. 93, sec. 4, effective June 27, 2025. -- Amended 2021 Ky. Acts ch. 124, sec. 7, effective June 29, 2021. -- Amended 2017 Ky. Acts ch. 82, sec. 8, effective June 29, 2017; and ch. 134, sec. 10, effective June 29, 2017. -- Amended 2010 Ky. Acts ch. 24, sec. 1801, effective July 15, 2010. -- Amended 2000 Ky. Acts ch. 514, sec. 12, effective July 14, 2000. -- Amended 1996 (1st Extra. Sess.) Ky. Acts ch. 1, sec. 10, effective December 12, 1996. -- Amended 1994 Ky. Acts ch. 181, Part 3, sec. 12, effective April 4, 1994. -- Amended 1964 Ky. Acts ch. 192, sec. 16. -- Amended 1990 Ky. Acts ch. 33, sec. 1, effective March 7, 1990, -- Amended 1987 (1st Extra. Sess.) Ky. Acts ch. 1, sec. 25, effective January 4, 1988. -- Amended 1984 Ky. Acts ch. 414, sec. 37, effective July 13, 1984, -- Amended 1976 Ky. Acts ch. 160, sec. 5. -- Amended 1954 Ky. Acts ch. 222, sec. 2. -- Amended 1948 Ky. Acts ch. 64, sec. 13. -- Recodified 1942 Ky. Acts ch. 208, sec. 1, effective October 1, 1942, from Ky. Stat. secs. 4618-112, 4923.

Legislative Research Commission Note (2/1/2018). Under the authority of KRS 7.136(1)(h), a reference to "subsection (3) of this section" in subsection (5) of this statute has been changed to "subsection (2) of this section" by the Reviser of Statutes following the enactment of 2017 Ky. Acts ch. 134, sec. 10, which deleted a subsection from KRS 342.230 and renumbered the subsequent subsections, but overlooked the internal subsection reference in the existing language.