



Oklahoma Workers' Compensation Commission

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OK Workers' Comp Commission Using Skype for Deliberations

(Oklahoma City, May 15, 2018) Oklahoma Workers' Comp Commission (WCC): The Commissioners at the WCC have integrated the use of the video conferencing tool "Skype" for their appellate deliberations. This technology allows the three commissioners and their legal counsel to communicate between Oklahoma City and Tulsa without leaving their offices.

The use of this technology is an effort to cut down on travel for key staff, and is a service provided by the Office of Management and Enterprise Services. This offers an alternative to driving between Tulsa and Oklahoma City for the Commission Appellate Counsel and the Commission Chairman Mark Liotta, for deliberations.

Chairman Liotta said, "The WCC staff continuously identifies methods for reducing cost and increasing efficiency. The use of this technology potentially saves us up to 9600 miles in travel costs, and 160 hours travel time annually, and allows for seamless meetings. Our deliberations by Skype are just as probative, collaborative, and productive as when deliberating in the same room."

WCC Appellate Counsel Lindsey Christopher of Tulsa can now support deliberations in Oklahoma City

from her office in Tulsa. Lindsey said, “It is great because I can be at my desk and have access to all of the reference files that I may need to support the Commissioners during their deliberations.”

Deliberations are held at least twice monthly. The commissioners generally deliberate each case twice after receiving written briefs, and once again after hearing the oral briefs of both parties to an appeal.

One major consideration which the WCC researched was the propriety of private deliberations for the Commissioners, a common practice for judicial panels in judicial proceedings.

While an administrative agency in the executive branch of state government, the WCC exercises the state’s judicial authority as a quasi-judicial body. The three commissioners sit as an en banc panel for all appeals of the WCC’s workers’ compensation cases. Commission business meetings, hearings, and appellate hearings must be scheduled, posted, and held publicly in accordance with the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act. However, the commissioners’ pre-decisional deliberations are confidential and protected by the deliberative process privilege.

Oklahoma Attorney General Opinion 2015-08 found that “confidential deliberations are essential to the Workers’ Compensation Commissioners’ quasi-judicial decision-making process, the Commissioners’ pre-decisional deliberations in cases considered in the exercise of their judicial power are protected by the deliberative process privilege by virtue of the separation of Powers Provision of Article IV, Section 1 of the Oklahoma Constitution.”

Oklahoma’s workers’ compensation system was reformed in 2013, establishing the Administrative Workers’ Compensation Act (Act). The Act created the Workers’ Compensation Commission (WCC) which became fully operational effective February 1, 2014. The WCC provides a forum for workers’ compensation hearings and appeals, ensures workers’ compensation insurance compliance of employers, and regulates organizations who wish to self-fund their workers’ compensation obligations.

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