

Chapter 73.16 RCW
EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT

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RCW 73.16.005 Intent—Purpose. (1) It is the intent of the legislature to guarantee employment rights of members of the reserve and national guard forces who are called to active duty. The federal uniformed services employment and reemployment rights act of 1994 protects all such federal personnel. The legislature intends that similar provisions should apply to all such state personnel. Therefore, the legislature intends for chapter 133, Laws of 2001 to ensure protections for state-activated personnel similar to those provided by federal law for federal-activated personnel.

(2) The purposes of this chapter are to:

(a) Encourage noncareer service in the uniformed services by eliminating or minimizing the disadvantages to civilian careers and employment that can result from such service;

(b) Minimize the disruption to the lives of persons performing service in the uniformed services as well as to their employers, their fellow employees, and their communities, by providing for the prompt reemployment of such persons upon their completion of such service; and

(c) Prohibit discrimination against persons because of their service in the uniformed services.

(3) Therefore, the legislature intends that the governmental agencies of the state of Washington, and all the political

subdivisions thereof, should be model employers in carrying out the provisions of this chapter. [2001 c 133 s 1.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [May 2, 2001]." [2001 c 133 s 15.]

RCW 73.16.010 Preference in public employment. In every public department, and upon all public works of the state, and of any county thereof, soldiers, sailors, guardians, marines and other members of the uniformed services who are veterans of any war of the United States, or of any military campaign for which a campaign ribbon shall have been awarded with a qualifying discharge as defined in RCW 73.04.005, and their widows or widowers, shall be preferred for appointment and employment. Age, loss of limb, or other physical impairment, which does not in fact incapacitate, shall not be deemed to disqualify them, provided they possess the capacity necessary to discharge the duties of the position involved: PROVIDED, That spouses of veterans with a qualifying discharge as defined in RCW 73.04.005 and who have a service connected permanent and total disability shall also be preferred for appointment and employment. [2024 c 146 s 33; 1975 1st ex.s. c 198 s 1; 1973 1st ex.s. c 154 s 107; 1951 c 29 s 1; 1943 c 141 s 1; 1919 c 26 s 1; 1915 c 129 s 1; 1895 c 84 s 1; Rem. Supp. 1943 s 10753.]

Intent—2024 c 146: See note following RCW 73.04.005.

Severability—1973 1st ex.s. c 154: See note following RCW 2.12.030.

Veterans to receive scoring criteria status in competitive examinations for public employment: RCW 41.04.010.

RCW 73.16.015 Enforcement of preference—Civil action. Any veteran entitled to the benefits of RCW 73.16.010 may enforce his or her rights hereunder by civil action in superior court. [2001 c 133 s 2; 1951 c 29 s 2.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.020 Failure to comply—Infraction. All officials or other persons having power to appoint to or employment in the public service set forth in RCW 73.16.010, are charged with a faithful compliance with its terms, both in letter and in spirit, and a failure therein shall be a class 1 civil infraction. [1987 c 456 s 30; 1895 c 84 s 2; RRS s 10754.]

Legislative finding—1987 c 456: See RCW 7.80.005.

Effective date—1987 c 456 ss 9 through 31: See RCW 7.80.901.

RCW 73.16.031 Definitions. The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Attorney general" means the attorney general of the state of Washington or any person designated by the attorney general to carry out a responsibility of the attorney general under this chapter.

(2) "Benefit," "benefit of employment," or "rights and benefits" means any advantage, profit, privilege, gain, status, account, or interest (other than wages or salary for work performed) that accrues by reason of an employment contract or agreement or an employer policy, plan, or practice and includes rights and benefits under a pension plan, a health plan, an employee stock ownership plan, insurance coverage and awards, bonuses, severance pay, supplemental unemployment benefits, vacations, and the opportunity to select work hours or location of employment.

(3) "Employee" means a person in a position of employment.

(4) "Employer" means the person, firm, or corporation, the state, or any elected or appointed public official currently having control over the position that has been vacated.

(5) "Health plan" means an insurance policy or contract, medical or hospital service agreement, membership or subscription contract, or other arrangement under which health services for individuals are provided or the expenses of such services are paid.

(6) "Notice" means any written or verbal notification of an obligation or intention to perform service in the uniformed services provided to an employer by the employee who will perform such service or by the uniformed service in which such service is to be performed.

(7) "Position of employment" means any position (other than temporary) wherein a person is engaged for a private employer, company, corporation, or the state.

(8) "Qualified," with respect to an employment position, means having the ability to perform the essential tasks of the position.

(9) "Rejectee" means a person rejected because he or she is not, physically or otherwise, qualified to enter the uniformed service.

(10) "Resident" means any person residing in the state with the intent to remain other than on a temporary or transient basis.

(11) "Seniority" means longevity in employment together with any benefits of employment which accrue with, or are determined by, longevity in employment.

(12) "Service in the uniformed services" means the performance of duty on a voluntary or involuntary basis in a uniformed service under competent authority and includes active duty, active duty for training, initial active duty for training, inactive duty training, full-time national guard duty (including state-ordered active duty), and a period for which a person is absent from a position of employment for the purpose of an examination to determine the fitness of the person to perform any such duty.

(13) "State" means the state of Washington, including the agencies and political subdivisions thereof.

(14) "Temporary position" means a position of short duration which, after being vacated, ceases to exist and wherein the employee has been advised as to its temporary nature prior to his or her engagement.

(15) "Undue hardship," in the case of actions taken by an employer, means actions requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of:

(a) The nature and cost of the action needed under this chapter;

(b) The overall financial resources of the facility or facilities involved in the provision of the action; the number of persons employed at such facility; the effect on expenses and resources; or the impact otherwise of such action upon the operation of the facility; and

(c) The type of operation or operations of the employer, including the composition, structure, and functions of the workforce of such employer, the geographic separateness, administrative, or fiscal relationship of the facility or facilities in question to the employer.

(16) "Uniformed services" means the armed forces, the army national guard, and the air national guard of any state, territory, commonwealth, possession, or district when engaged in active duty for training, inactive duty training, full-time national guard duty, or state active duty, the commissioned corps of the public health service, the coast guard, and any other category of persons designated by the president of the United States in time of war or national emergency. [2001 c 133 s 3; 1953 c 212 s 1.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

Employment and reemployment rights of members of organized militia upon return from militia duty: RCW 38.24.060.

RCW 73.16.032 Employment rights—Prohibited actions. (1) A person who is a member of, applies to be a member of, performs, has performed, applies to perform, or has an obligation to perform service in a uniformed service shall not be denied initial employment, retention in employment, promotion, or any benefit of employment by an employer on the basis of that membership, application for membership, performance of service, application for service, or obligation.

(2) An employer may not discriminate in employment against or take any adverse employment action against any person because such person (a) has taken an action to enforce a protection afforded any person under this chapter, (b) has testified or otherwise made a statement in or in connection with any proceeding under this chapter, (c) has assisted or otherwise participated in an investigation under this chapter, or (d) has exercised a right provided for in this chapter. The prohibition in this subsection (2) applies with respect to a person regardless of whether that person has performed service in the uniformed services.

(3) An employer shall be considered to have engaged in actions prohibited:

(a) Under subsection (1) of this section, if the person's membership, application for membership, service, application for service, or obligation for service in the uniformed services is a motivating factor in the employer's action, unless the employer can prove that the action would have been taken in the absence of such membership, application for membership, service, application for service, or obligation for service; or

(b) Under subsection (2) of this section if the person's (i) action to enforce a protection afforded any person under this chapter, (ii) testimony or making of a statement in or in connection with any proceeding under this chapter, (iii) assistance or other participation in an investigation under this chapter, or (iv) exercise of a right

provided for in this chapter, is a motivating factor in the employer's action, unless the employer can prove that the action would have been taken in the absence of such person's enforcement action, testimony, statement, assistance, participation, or exercise of a right. [2001 c 133 s 4.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.033 Reemployment of returned veterans. Any person who is a resident of this state or is employed within this state, and who voluntarily or upon order from competent authority, vacates a position of employment for service in the uniformed services, shall, provided he or she meets the requirements of RCW 73.16.035, be reemployed forthwith: PROVIDED, That the employer need not reemploy such person if circumstances have so changed such that reemployment would be impossible or unreasonable due to a change in the employer's circumstances, or would impose an undue hardship on the employer: PROVIDED FURTHER, That this section shall not apply to a temporary position.

If such person is still qualified to perform the duties of his or her former position, he or she shall be restored to that position or to a position of like seniority, status and pay. If he or she is not so qualified as a result of disability sustained during his or her service in the uniformed services, but is nevertheless qualified to perform the duties of another position, under the control of the same employer, he or she shall be reemployed in such other position: PROVIDED, That such position shall provide him or her with like seniority, status, and pay, or the nearest approximation thereto consistent with the circumstances of the case. [2001 c 133 s 5; 1953 c 212 s 2.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.035 Eligibility requirements—Exceptions—Burden of proof. (1) In order to be eligible for the benefits of this chapter, an applicant must comply with the following requirements:

(a) The applicant must notify his or her employer as to his or her membership in the uniformed services within a reasonable time of accepting employment or becoming a member of the uniformed services. An employer may not take any action prohibited in RCW 73.16.032 against a person because the person provided notice of membership in the uniformed services to the employer.

(b) The applicant must furnish a receipt of an honorable, or under honorable conditions discharge, report of separation, certificate of satisfactory service, or other proof of having satisfactorily completed his or her service. Rejectees must furnish proof of orders for examination and rejection.

(c) The applicant must make written application to the employer or his or her representative as follows:

(i) In the case of an applicant whose period of service in the uniformed services was less than thirty-one days, by reporting to the employer:

(A) Not later than the beginning of the first full regularly scheduled work period on the first full calendar day following the

completion of the period of service and the expiration of eight hours after a period allowing for the safe transportation of the applicant from the place of that service to the applicant's residence; or

(B) As soon as possible after the expiration of the eight-hour period in (c)(i)(A) of this subsection, if reporting within that period is impossible or unreasonable through no fault of the applicant;

(ii) In the case of an applicant who is absent from a position of employment for a period of any length for the purposes of an examination to determine the applicant's fitness to perform service in the uniformed services, by reporting in the manner and time referred to in (c)(i) of this subsection;

(iii) In the case of an applicant whose period of service in the uniformed services was for more than thirty days but less than one hundred eighty-one days, by submitting an application for reemployment with the employer not later than fourteen days after the completion of the period of service or if submitting such application within such period is impossible or unreasonable through no fault of the applicant, the next first full calendar day when submission of such application becomes possible;

(iv) In the case of an applicant whose period of service in the uniformed services was for more than one hundred eighty days, by submitting an application for reemployment with the employer not later than ninety days after the completion of the period of service;

(v) In the case of an applicant who is hospitalized for, or convalescing from, an illness or injury incurred or aggravated during the performance of service in the uniformed services, at the end of the period that is necessary for the applicant to recover from such illness or injury, the applicant shall submit an application for reemployment with such employer. The period of recovery may not exceed two years. This two-year period shall be extended by the minimum time required to accommodate the circumstances beyond the applicant's control that make reporting within the two-year period impossible or unreasonable;

(vi) In the case of an applicant who fails to report or apply for employment or reemployment within the appropriate period specified in this subsection (1)(c), the applicant does not automatically forfeit his or her entitlement to the rights and benefits conferred by this chapter, but is subject to the conduct rules, established policy, and general practices of the employer pertaining to explanations and discipline with respect to absence from scheduled work.

(d) An applicant who submits an application for reemployment shall provide to the applicant's employer, upon the request of that employer, documentation to establish that:

(i) The application is timely;

(ii) The applicant has not exceeded the service limitations set forth in this section, except as permitted under (c)(v) of this subsection; and

(iii) The applicant's entitlement to the benefits under this chapter has not been terminated pursuant to (e) of this subsection.

(e) The applicant must return and reenter the office or position within the appropriate period specified in (c) of this subsection after serving four years or less in the uniformed services other than state-ordered active duty: PROVIDED, That any period of additional service imposed by law, from which one is unable to obtain orders relieving him or her from active duty, will not affect reemployment rights.

(f) The applicant must return and reenter the office or position within the appropriate period specified in (c) of this subsection after serving twelve weeks or less in a calendar year in state-ordered active duty: PROVIDED, That the governor, when declaring an emergency that necessitates a longer period of service, may extend the period of service in state-ordered active duty to up to twelve months after which the applicant is eligible for the benefits of this chapter.

(2) The failure of an applicant to provide documentation that satisfies rules adopted pursuant to subsection (1)(c) of this section shall not be a basis for denying reemployment in accordance with the provisions of this chapter if the failure occurs because such documentation does not exist or is not readily available at the time of the request of the employer. If, after such reemployment, documentation becomes available that establishes that the applicant does not meet one or more of the requirements referred to in subsection (1)(d) of this section, that applicant's employer may terminate the employment of the person and the provision of any rights or benefits afforded the person under this chapter.

(3) An employer may not delay or attempt to defeat a reemployment obligation by demanding documentation that does not then exist or is not then readily available.

(4) The application in subsection (1) of this section is not required if the giving of such application is precluded by military necessity or, under all of the relevant circumstances, the giving of such notice is otherwise impossible or unreasonable. A determination of military necessity for the purposes of this subsection shall be made by the adjutant general of the state of Washington military department and is not subject to judicial review.

(5) In any proceeding involving an issue of whether (a) reemployment is impossible or unreasonable because of a change in an employer's circumstances, (b) reemployment would impose an undue hardship on the employer, or (c) the employment is for a temporary position, the employer has the burden of proving the impossibility or unreasonableness, undue hardship, or the brief or nonrecurrent nature of the employment without a reasonable expectation of continuing indefinitely or for a significant period. [2001 c 133 s 6; 1969 c 16 s 1; 1953 c 212 s 3.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.041 Leaves of absence of elective and judicial officers. When any elective officer of this state or any political subdivision thereof, including any judicial officer, shall enter upon active service or training as provided in RCW 73.16.031, 73.16.033 and 73.16.035, the proper officer, board or other agency, which would ordinarily be authorized to grant leave of absence or fill a vacancy created by the death or resignation of the elective official so ordered to such service, shall grant an extended leave of absence to cover the period of such active service or training and may appoint a temporary successor to the position so vacated. No leave of absence provided for herein shall operate to extend the term for which the occupant of any elective position shall have been elected. [1953 c 212 s 4.]

RCW 73.16.051 Restoration without loss of seniority or benefits.

Any person who is entitled to be restored to a position in accordance with this chapter shall be considered as having been on furlough or leave of absence, from his or her position of employment, during his or her period of active military duty or service, and he or she shall be so restored without loss of seniority. He or she shall further be entitled to participate in insurance, vacations, retirement pay, and other benefits offered by the employer pursuant to established rules and practices relating to employees on furlough or leave of absence in effect with the employer at the time such person was ordered into the service; and he or she shall not be discharged from such position without cause within one year after restoration. [2001 c 133 s 7; 1953 c 212 s 5.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.053 Continuation of health plan coverage during absence—Reinstatement of health plan coverage upon reemployment. (1)

If a person, or the person's dependents, have coverage under a health plan in connection with the person's position of state employment, and the person is absent from his or her position of state employment by reason of service in the uniformed services, the plan shall provide that the person may elect to continue the coverage as provided in this section. The maximum period of coverage of a person and person's dependents under such an election shall be the lesser of:

(a) The eighteen-month period beginning on the date on which the person's absence begins; or

(b) The day after the date on which the person fails to apply for or return to a position of state employment, as determined under RCW 73.16.035.

(2) A person who elects to continue health plan coverage under this section may be required to pay not more than one hundred two percent of the full premium under the plan associated with the coverage for the state employer's other employees, except that in the case of a person who performs service in the uniformed services for less than thirty-one days, the person may not be required to pay more than the employee share, if any, for the coverage.

(3) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, if a person's coverage under a health plan was terminated because of service in the uniformed services, an exclusion or waiting period may not be imposed in connection with the reinstatement of the coverage upon reemployment under this chapter if an exclusion or waiting period would not have been imposed under a health plan had coverage of the person by the plan not been terminated as a result of his or her service. This subsection applies to the person who is reemployed and to any dependent who is covered by the plan because of the reinstatement of the coverage of the person. [2001 c 133 s 8.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.055 Determination of pension benefits and liabilities for reemployed persons. (1)(a) In the case of a right provided under any state law governing pension benefits for state employees, the

right to pension benefits of a person reemployed under this chapter shall be determined under this section.

(b) A person reemployed under this chapter shall be treated as not having incurred a break in service with the state because of the person's period of service in the uniformed services.

(c) Each period served by a person in the uniformed services shall, upon reemployment under this chapter, be deemed to constitute service with the state for the purpose of determining the nonforfeitability of the person's accrued benefits and for the purpose of determining the accrual of benefits under the plan.

(2) When the state is reemploying a person under this chapter, the state is liable to an employee pension benefit plan for funding any obligation of the plan to provide the pension benefits described in this section and shall allocate the amounts of any employer contribution for the person in the same manner and to the same extent the allocation occurs for other employees during the period of service. For purposes of determining the amount of such liability and any obligation of the plan, earnings and forfeitures shall not be included. For purposes of determining the amount of such liability and purposes of a state law governing pension benefits for state employees, service in the uniformed services that is deemed under subsection (1) of this section to be service with the state shall be deemed to be service with the state under the terms of the plan or any applicable collective bargaining agreement.

(3) A person reemployed by the state under this chapter is entitled to accrued benefits pursuant to subsection (1)(a) of this section that are contingent on the making of, or derived from, employee contributions or elective deferrals (as defined in section 402(g)(3) of the internal revenue code of 1986) only to the extent the person makes payment to the plan with respect to such contributions or deferrals. No such payment may exceed the amount the person would have been permitted or required to contribute had the person remained continuously employed by the state throughout the period of uniformed service. Any payment to the plan described in this subsection shall be made during the period beginning with the date of reemployment and whose duration is three times the period of the person's services, such payment period in the uniformed services, not to exceed five years.

(4) For purposes of computing an employer's liability of the employee's contributions under subsection (2) of this section, the employee's compensation during the period of service shall be computed:

(a) At the rate the employee would have received but for the period of service in subsection (1)(b) of this section; or

(b) In the case that the determination of such rate is not reasonably certain, on the basis of the employee's average rate of compensation during the twelve-month period immediately preceding such period or if shorter, the period of employment immediately preceding such period. [2001 c 133 s 9.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.061 Enforcement of provisions. (1) If any employer, or any employer's successor or successors, fails or refuses to comply with the provisions of RCW 73.16.031 through 73.16.061 and 73.16.090,

the attorney general must bring action in the superior court in the county in which the employer is located or does business to obtain an order to specifically require such employer to comply with the provisions of this chapter, and, as an incident thereto, to compensate such person for any loss of wages or benefits suffered by reason of such employer's unlawful act if:

(a) The service in question was state duty not covered by the uniformed services employment and reemployment rights act of 1994, P.L. 103-353 (38 U.S.C. Sec. 4301 et seq.); and

(b) The adjutant general of the Washington state military department, or his or her designee, has inquired with the employer regarding the matter and has been unable to resolve it.

(2) If the conditions in subsection (1)(a) and (b) of this section are met, any such person who does not desire the services of the attorney general may, by private counsel, bring such action. [2016 c 12 s 1; 2013 c 23 s 190; 2001 c 133 s 10; 1953 c 212 s 6.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.070 Federal act to apply in state courts. The federal uniformed services employment and reemployment rights act, P.L. 103-353, as amended, is hereby specifically declared to apply in proper cases in all the courts of this state. [2014 c 65 s 7; 2001 c 133 s 11; 1941 c 201 s 5; Rem. Supp. 1941 s 10758-7.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.080 Bona fide executive, administrative, and professional employees—Offset of military pay. An offset of any military pay for temporary service in the uniformed services in a particular week against the salary of a bona fide executive, administrative, or professional employee in a particular week shall not be a factor in determining whether the employee is exempt under *RCW 49.46.010(5)(c). [2001 c 133 s 12.]

***Reviser's note:** RCW 49.46.010 was alphabetized pursuant to RCW 1.08.015(2)(k), changing subsection (5) to subsection (3). RCW 49.46.010 was subsequently alphabetized pursuant to RCW 1.08.015(2)(k), changing subsection (3) to subsection (4).

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.090 Application of chapter—Other rights and benefits preserved. This chapter shall not supersede, nullify, or diminish any federal or state law, ordinance, rule, regulation, contract, agreement, policy, plan, practice, or other matter that establishes a right or benefit that is more beneficial to, or is in addition to, a right or benefit provided for such person in this chapter. [2001 c 133 s 13.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.100 Legislative declaration—Other civil actions abolished. The legislature declares that the public policies articulated in chapter 133, Laws of 2001 depend on the procedures established in chapter 133, Laws of 2001. No civil or criminal action may be maintained relying on the public policies articulated in chapter 133, Laws of 2001 without complying with the procedures in this chapter. To that end, all civil actions and civil causes of action for such injuries and all jurisdiction of the courts of this state over such causes are hereby abolished, except as provided in this chapter. [2001 c 133 s 14.]

Effective date—2001 c 133: See note following RCW 73.16.005.

RCW 73.16.110 Preference in private employment—Permissive. (1) The legislature intends to establish a permissive preference in private employment for certain veterans.

(2) In every private, nonpublic employment in this state, honorably discharged soldiers, sailors, and marines who are veterans of any war of the United States, or of any military campaign for which a campaign ribbon has been awarded, and their widows or widowers, may be preferred for employment. Spouses of honorably discharged veterans who have a service connected permanent and total disability may also be preferred for employment. These preferences are not considered violations of any state or local equal employment opportunity law, including but not limited to any statute or regulation adopted under chapter 49.60 RCW.

(3) "Veteran" has the same meanings as defined in RCW 41.04.005 and 41.04.007, and includes a current member of the national guard or armed forces reserves who has been deployed to serve in an armed conflict. [2011 c 144 s 1.]

RCW 73.16.120 Veteran employment demonstration campaign. (1) The department of veterans affairs, employment security department, and department of commerce shall consult local chambers of commerce, associate development organizations, and businesses to initiate a demonstration campaign to increase veteran employment. This campaign may include partnerships with chambers of commerce that result in business owners sharing, with the local chamber of commerce, information on the number of veterans employed and the local chambers of commerce providing this information to the department of veterans affairs.

(2) Participants in the campaign are encouraged to work with the Washington state military transition council and county veterans' advisory boards as defined in RCW 73.08.035.

(3) Funding for the campaign shall be established from existing resources.

(4) For the purposes of this section, "veteran" has the definition given in RCW 41.04.007. [2024 c 146 s 34; 2015 c 57 s 2.]

Intent—2024 c 146: See note following RCW 73.04.005.

Findings—Intent—2015 c 57: "The legislature finds that veterans are national heroes who have made great sacrifices in their lives for the protection of our nation. The legislature recognizes that many of

these veterans reside in Washington where there are a high number of military installations.

Over six hundred thousand veterans reside in Washington. The legislature finds that the unemployment rate among these veterans is of great concern, particularly among young veterans. In 2014, the unemployment rate for veterans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five was approximately twenty-one percent, despite having such diverse and valued skill sets, including expertise in fields such as health care or technology, and strong discipline and leadership abilities.

The legislature recognizes the importance of facilitating and focusing on the hiring of our veterans.

For these reasons, the legislature intends to create a statewide campaign to increase veteran employment in Washington by engaging state agencies, local governments, and businesses." [2015 c 57 s 1.]

RCW 73.16.900 Construction—Chapter applicable to state registered domestic partnerships—2009 c 521. For the purposes of this chapter, the terms spouse, marriage, marital, husband, wife, widow, widower, next of kin, and family shall be interpreted as applying equally to state registered domestic partnerships or individuals in state registered domestic partnerships as well as to marital relationships and married persons, and references to dissolution of marriage shall apply equally to state registered domestic partnerships that have been terminated, dissolved, or invalidated, to the extent that such interpretation does not conflict with federal law. Where necessary to implement chapter 521, Laws of 2009, gender-specific terms such as husband and wife used in any statute, rule, or other law shall be construed to be gender neutral, and applicable to individuals in state registered domestic partnerships. [2009 c 521 s 172.]