§ 7554. Selection of arbitrators. (a) An arbitration under this article shall be heard by a panel of three arbitrators. The chairperson of the panel shall be an attorney who shall be appointed to serve in such capacity on a full-time basis for a fixed term. The chairperson shall have jurisdiction over prehearing procedures. Qualifications for the selection of such chairpersons shall be established by the arbitration administrator, subject to the approval of the superintendent of financial services.

(b) Except as otherwise provided in subdivision (e) of this section, the remaining two arbitrators, hereinafter referred to as associate arbitrators, shall be selected from a pool of candidates established pursuant to the rules and procedures promulgated by the arbitration administrator and approved by the superintendent of financial services. Attorneys whose practice substantially involves representation in personal injury matters, physicians, dentists, hospital and health maintenance organization personnel and other health care providers shall not be eligible to serve as associate arbitrators. The rules and procedures pertaining to selection of associate arbitrators under this article shall provide that the arbitration administrator send simultaneously to each party an identical list of associate arbitrator candidates, together with a brief biographical statement on each candidate. A party may strike from the list any name which is unacceptable and shall number the remaining names in order of preference. When the lists are returned to the arbitration administrator they shall be compared and the first two mutually agreeable associate arbitrator candidates shall be invited to serve.

(c) When two mutually agreed upon associate arbitrators have not been selected from the first list, a second list of such candidates shall be sent in the manner provided for in subdivision (b) of this section.

(d) If a complete panel is not selected by mutual agreement of the parties pursuant to subdivisions (b) and (c) of this section, then, under applicable rules and procedures of the arbitration administrator, which are approved by the superintendent of financial services, the arbitration administrator shall appoint the remaining associate arbitrators. Any appointment of an associate arbitrator by the arbitration administrator shall be subject to challenge by any party for cause. To be sufficient, a challenge must allege facts which establish

that community, professional or other pressures are likely to influence the objectivity of the appointed associate arbitrator. A decision on a request to strike an arbitrator for cause shall be made by the arbitration administrator.

(e) The parties shall not be restricted to the associate arbitrator candidates submitted for consideration. If all parties mutually agree upon one or more associate arbitrators, such arbitrators shall be invited to serve.