

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1653

As Reported By House Committee On:
Commerce & Labor

Title: An act relating to vocational rehabilitation in industrial insurance.

Brief Description: Regulating vocational rehabilitation services in industrial insurance.

Sponsors: Representatives King, Lisk, G. Cole and Fuhrman.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Commerce & Labor, March 2, 1993, DPA.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Heavey, Chair; G. Cole, Vice Chair; Lisk, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Conway; Horn; King; Springer; and Veloria.

Staff: Chris Cordes (786-7117).

Background: Injured workers may participate in vocational rehabilitation programs if the programs are necessary and likely to enable the worker to become employable at gainful employment. The program may only be used before the worker is evaluated for permanent disability. The Department of Labor and Industries may pay, or direct a self-insurer to pay, up to \$3,000 toward the costs of books, tuition, supplies, transportation, child or dependent care, and other necessary expenses of the program.

Summary of Amended Bill: The cost of an industrial insurance vocational rehabilitation program is changed from a maximum of \$3,000 to an amount not to exceed 155 percent of the state average monthly wage (currently, the amount would be approximately \$3,058).

In addition to the costs of the program, the department may pay for transportation and child or dependent care related to an injured worker's participation in a vocational rehabilitation program.

The requirement is deleted that a vocational rehabilitation program may only be used before the worker is evaluated for permanent disability.

A person who provides on-the-job training or a transitional work program for injured workers may elect industrial insurance coverage for the workers receiving the services, regardless of whether the person pays wages to the injured workers. The workers will be qualified under the preferred worker program.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The amended bill changes reference to "work hardening" to "transitional work;" and provides that workers in on-the-job training or a transitional work program are qualified under the preferred worker program.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 22, 1993.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This bill offers opportunities to make small, needed corrections in the vocational rehabilitation program without attempting to reform the entire program. These changes will give the Department of Labor and Industries more flexibility and allow for the development of better rehabilitation plans. Dealing with the cost of travel and child care separately will assist injured workers in rural areas and injured workers who are single parents. The bill also allows the maximum cost of the program to increase with inflation.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Dwight Thompson, and Julie Grant, National Association of Rehabilitation Professionals in the Private Sector.