

FINAL BILL REPORT

ESHB 2947

C 233 L 98

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Revising unemployment compensation for part-time faculty.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Commerce & Labor (originally sponsored by Representatives McMorris, Conway, Carlson, Kenney, Costa, Wood, Ogden and Gardner; by request of Employment Security Department).

House Committee on Commerce & Labor
Senate Committee on Commerce & Labor

Background: Under the Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA), if a state maintains an unemployment insurance system in conformity with federal law, that state's employers receive a tax credit against their federal unemployment tax of 90 percent of the federal tax. In addition, the conforming state receives a share of the FUTA revenues for administration of its unemployment insurance system.

One of the requirements of federal law addresses unemployment benefits for certain public and nonprofit educational institutions' employees. Unemployment compensation may not be paid to these employees for unemployment that occurs between two successive academic years or terms if the employee has reasonable assurance that he or she will be reemployed for the same services in the next academic year or term. Reasonable assurance is defined as a written, verbal or implied agreement that the employee will be reemployed in the same capacity. Until 1995, Washington's unemployment insurance statutes included language that was the same as federal law.

In 1994, the Washington Court of Appeals held that, in view of the state's failure to show that summer quarter was qualitatively different from other academic terms and the lack of any indication that the Legislature intended summer quarters to be "off" quarters, unemployment benefits could not be denied during the summer for a part-time community college faculty member who was not offered a position during the summer quarter. Following that decision, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) advised the Employment Security Department that the court's opinion raised a federal conformity issue.

The following year, legislation was enacted that amended the requirements for unemployment insurance determinations involving part-time faculties at community colleges and technical colleges. For these faculties, the definition of academic year means fall, winter, spring, and summer quarters or comparable semesters, unless

objective criteria, including enrollment and staffing, show that the term is not in fact part of the educational institution's academic year.

For determining eligibility for benefits between successive academic years or terms for these part-time faculties, the 1995 law provides that reasonable assurance does not include an agreement to provide services when the agreement is contingent on enrollment, funding, or program changes.

The USDOL has again advised the Employment Security Department that this law raises a federal conformity issue because the law does not apply the same provisions to all educational employees. The Secretary of Labor has notified the Employment Security Department that she is commencing conformity proceedings against the state of Washington. The Employment Security Department has requested a hearing on this matter.

Summary: The Legislature recognizes the need to bring the state's unemployment compensation law into conformity with federal law, and recognizes that there are instructional staff at the state's educational institutions that have less assurance of returning to employment in an ensuing academic year or term than others. The Legislature declares its intent that the Employment Security Department continue to handle determinations of eligibility for the unemployment compensation in cases involving a finding of reasonable assurance on a case by case basis consistent with federal guidelines and to consider contingencies that exist in each individual case. The Legislature further declares that removing reference to contingent agreements is not intended to change the practice of the Employment Security Department when determining reasonable assurance.

The definition of academic year includes a summer quarter or semester as part of the academic year unless, based on objective criteria, the summer quarter or semester is in fact not part of the academic year for the particular institution. This definition applies to all educational employees.

The provision is deleted that defines reasonable assurance as not including agreements that are contingent on funding, enrollment, or program changes.

A previously enacted but uncodified intent statement is repealed.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 88 0

Senate 45 4

Effective: March 30, 1998