

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 5631

As Reported By House Committee On:
Commerce & Labor
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to vocational rehabilitation compensation.

Brief Description: Increasing the amount of allowable vocational rehabilitation benefits.

Sponsors: Senators Wojahn, Winsley, Fairley and Costa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Commerce & Labor: 4/2/99 [DPA];

Appropriations: 4/5/99 [DPA(CL)].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Increases from \$3,000 to \$4,000 the maximum amount that may be paid in a year for vocational rehabilitation benefits for workers with vocational rehabilitation plans approved on or after July 1, 1999.
- Excludes an injured worker's transportation costs from being subject to the new limit.
- Requires a cost-benefit analysis of the new limit.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Clements, Republican Co-Chair; Conway, Democratic Co-Chair; B. Chandler, Republican Vice Chair; Wood, Democratic Vice Chair; Hurst; Lisk and McIntire.

Staff: Chris Cordes (786-7103).

Background:

The Department of Labor and Industries is authorized to pay, and may direct self-insured employers to pay, the costs of vocational rehabilitation services for injured workers when these services are necessary and likely to enable the injured worker to become employable at gainful employment. These costs are limited to \$3,000 in a 52-week period and include the cost of books, tuition, fees, supplies, equipment, transportation, child or dependent care, and other necessary expenses. The department may extend the period of benefits for an additional 52 weeks.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Beginning with vocational rehabilitation plans approved on or after July 1, 1999, the maximum amount that the Department of Labor and Industries may pay, or order a self-insurer to pay, for an injured worker's vocational rehabilitation benefits in a 52-week period is increased from \$3,000 to \$4,000. (The new limit also applies if a second year of benefits is authorized.)

The expenditure limit does not apply to the injured worker's transportation costs.

The department is required to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the benefit increase, including an examination of benefit utilization and vocational results. The analysis must be reported to the Workers' Compensation Advisory Committee and the Legislature by November 1, 2001.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Bill: The amended bill limits application of the increased benefit cap to claims that have vocational rehabilitation plans approved on or after July 1, 1999, and adds a requirement for the Department of Labor and Industries to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the increased benefit cap.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect July 1, 1999.

Testimony For: None.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Commerce & Labor. Signed by 32 members: Representatives Huff, Republican Co-Chair; H. Sommers, Democratic Co-Chair; Alexander, Republican Vice Chair; Doumit, Democratic Vice Chair; D. Schmidt, Republican Vice Chair; Barlean; Benson; Boldt; Carlson; Clements; Cody; Crouse; Gombosky; Grant; Kagi; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler; Lambert; Linville; Lisk; Mastin; McIntire; McMorris; Mulliken; Parlette; Regala; Rockefeller; Ruderman; Sullivan; Tokuda and Wensman.

Staff: Mark Matteson (786-7145).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee on Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee on Commerce & Labor: No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on April 5, 1999.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect July 1, 1999.

Testimony For: None.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: None.