

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 5631

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Labor & Workforce Development, February 3, 2000

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: Labor & Workforce Development: 2/23/99, 3/2/99 [DPA]; 2/3/00 [DPS].

Passed Senate, 3/15/99, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5631 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Franklin, Vice Chair; Hochstatter, Kline, Oke and Wojahn.

Staff: Jack Brummel (786-7428)

Background: Under the state's workers' compensation system, up to \$5,000 may be expended on accommodations for an injured worker that are medically necessary for participation in retraining and to perform the functions of a new job.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Early intervention benefits are allowed for injured workers with an approved job analysis who are expected to be disabled for more than 12 months. Up to \$5,000 may be spent on early intervention services. All of the \$5,000 allowed may be spent on accommodations for retraining or a new job, and up to \$2,500 of the \$5,000 allowed may be spent on skill enhancement costs, professional consultants, and a wage subsidy. Early intervention benefits received must be repaid by the employer if the employer does not retain the injured worker for at least 52 weeks. A procedure is specified for the collection of repayments.

Substitute Bill Compared to Engrossed Bill: The original bill provided for an increase in the amount of vocational rehabilitation benefits. The substitute removes that language and inserts the provisions for early intervention benefits.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 22, 1999.

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

Testimony For: Travel and child care costs are high. Tuition and fees have increased substantially. This is a small and inadequate fix but it is needed. It is time for an increase.

Testimony Against: It would be a nightmare for claims managers to handle the paperwork on child care expenses if they are taken out of the cap.

Testified: PRO: Pat Brouillette, NOVA Vocational Services; Michael Temple, Washington State Trial Lawyers Association; Robby Stern, WSLC, AFL-CIO; Clif Finch, AWB; CON: Margie Weinberg, Washington Self Insurers.