
Labor & Workforce Development Committee

SSB 5362

Brief Description: Addressing the recommendations of the vocational rehabilitation subcommittee for workers' compensation.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Commerce & Labor (originally sponsored by Senators Conway, Holmquist Newbry, Keiser and Kohl-Welles; by request of Department of Labor & Industries).

<p style="text-align: center;">Brief Summary of Substitute Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extends the vocational rehabilitation pilot program an additional three years, until June 30, 2016.
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Hearing Date: 3/20/13

Staff: Trudes Tango (786-7384).

Background:

One of the primary purposes of the Industrial Insurance Act is to enable injured workers to become employable at gainful employment. The Department of Labor and Industries (Department) pays, or directs self-insurers to pay, the costs of vocational rehabilitation services when these services are necessary and likely to enable the injured worker to become employable at gainful employment.

In 2007 the Legislature enacted Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5920, which created a vocational rehabilitation pilot program for vocational rehabilitation plans approved between January 1, 2008 and June 30, 2013.

The pilot program made numerous changes to the vocational rehabilitation system, including: requiring plans to be developed and approved by the Department within a certain amount of

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time; increasing the benefits for vocational rehabilitation plans; extending the length of time for vocational rehabilitation; and giving injured workers a choice of either participating in an approved plan or declining to participate and receiving six months' worth of time-loss benefits plus access to vocational benefits for a limited time.

The legislation creating the pilot program required an independent evaluation of the program, which was concluded by the University of Washington in December 2012. The legislation also created the Vocational Rehabilitation subcommittee, which must submit an annual report to the Legislature. The report must include the number of workers who have participated in more than one vocational training plan and in which industries those workers were employed.

The pilot program is scheduled to end June 30, 2013.

Summary of Bill:

The vocational rehabilitation pilot program is extended through June 30, 2016. The provision requiring the independent review of the program, due in December 2012, is removed.

The Vocational Rehabilitation subcommittee and the Department must develop an annual report, with the final report due to the Legislature by December 2015. The requirement that the annual report include the number of workers who have participated in more than one vocational training plan, beginning with plans approved in 2008, is removed.

The sections establishing the program expire June 30, 2016.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.