

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5362

As Reported by House Committee On: Labor & Workforce Development

Title: An act relating to recommendations of the vocational rehabilitation subcommittee for workers' compensation.

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).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Labor & Workforce Development: 3/20/13, 3/26/13 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Extends the vocational rehabilitation pilot program an additional three years, until June 30, 2016.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Sells, Chair; Manweller, Ranking Minority Member; Condotta, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Green, Holy, Moeller, Ormsby and Short.

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.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

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 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.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is agency request legislation. The original legislation required an independent study to be made, which was done by the University of Washington. That study

struggled to show outcomes for injured workers because of the timing of the recession. The Vocational Rehabilitation Subcommittee agreed unanimously to extend the program. They recognize the numerous efficiencies gained by the program and would like the chance to see the outcomes of the pilot program.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Vickie Kennedy, Department of Labor and Industries.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.