

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6224

As Passed House:

February 28, 1996

Title: An act relating to providing flexibility for vocational rehabilitation benefits within the long-term disability pilot projects.

Brief Description: Exempting long-time disability pilot project participants from an expenditure limitation.

Sponsors: Senators Pelz, Deccio, Wojahn and Newhouse; by request of Department of Labor & Industries.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Commerce & Labor: 2/14/96, 2/22/96 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/28/96, 94-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives McMorris, Chairman; Hargrove, Vice Chairman; Thompson, Ranking Minority Member; Romero, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Conway; Cairnes; Cody; Cole; Fuhrman; Goldsmith; Horn and Lisk.

Staff: Chris Cordes (786-7117).

Background: The Department of Labor and Industries may pay, or direct self-insured employers to pay, the costs of vocational rehabilitation for injured workers. The expenditures are limited to \$3,000 in a 52-week period, including books, tuition, fees, equipment, transportation, child or dependent care, and other necessary expenses. The department may extend the period up to an additional 52 weeks.

In 1994, the Legislature authorized the department to conduct two pilot projects to evaluate efforts to prevent long-term disability. These projects include changes that shift resources to the early management of the most difficult claims. The projects terminate June 30, 1999.

Summary of Bill: The limitation of \$3,000 in a 52-week period for vocational rehabilitation benefits for injured workers does not apply to benefits for workers in the long-term disability pilot projects. The Department of Labor and Industries may authorize vocational rehabilitation benefits of up to \$6,000, including on-the-job training, for workers in the pilot projects. The costs of child care and travel are not counted toward the limit.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This legislation is the last piece needed to effectuate the recommendations of the Joint Labor Management Task Force for the Prevention of Long-Term Disability. The task force recommended that more efforts should be put "up front" into an industrial insurance claim. Allowing vocational plans to use money ordinarily available only in the second year of a vocational rehabilitation program assists this early intervention effort.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Mark Brown, Department of Labor and Industries.