

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6414

As Passed House:

February 26, 1996

Title: An act relating to the voluntary withholding of federal income tax from unemployment insurance benefit payments.

Brief Description: Providing for federal income tax withholding from unemployment compensation benefits.

Sponsors: Senators Pelz and Newhouse; by request of Employment Security Department.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Commerce & Labor: 2/8/96, 2/14/96 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/26/96, 95-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives McMorris, Chairman; Hargrove, Vice Chairman; Thompson, Vice Chairman; Romero, Ranking Minority Member; Conway, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cairnes; Cody; Cole; Goldsmith and Horn.

Staff: Chris Cordes (786-7117).

Background: In 1978, the federal Internal Revenue Code was amended to tax unemployment benefits of claimants whose household incomes were above certain levels. Over the next decade, the income levels were eliminated, and by 1986 all unemployment compensation became subject to federal income tax. However, federal income tax is not withheld from the compensation.

In 1994, federal law was changed to require the states' unemployment insurance programs to offer voluntary withholding of federal income tax from unemployment compensation. The amount to be deducted is 15 percent of the payment to the claimant. The voluntary withholding program must be in effect for payments made after December 31, 1996.

Summary of Bill:

Legislative findings

The Legislature finds that (1) states have special responsibilities under the unique federal and state partnership of the unemployment insurance program; (2) to maintain conformity with federal law, the states must offer unemployment insurance claimants the option of agency withholding of federal income tax from unemployment compensation; and (3) offering a withholding program responds to the needs of claimants and is a reasonable strategy for claimants to spread the payment of their federal income tax over a period of time.

Voluntary withholding program

When a claimant files a new claim for unemployment insurance, the claimant must be advised of the following:

- (1) unemployment insurance is subject to federal income tax;
- (2) taxpayers are subject to requirements for estimating tax payments; and
- (3) claimants may elect to have federal income tax withheld at the amount specified in the federal Internal Revenue Code and may change a previous election.

Amounts withheld will remain in the unemployment trust fund until transferred to the federal taxing authority. The commissioner of the Employment Security Department must follow all procedures specified in federal law regarding the withholding of income tax. Deductions will be made in accordance with priorities established in department rules.

These procedures apply to payments made after December 31, 1996.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on December 31, 1996.

Testimony For: This bill is needed to comply with the federal law relating to unemployment insurance.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Graeme Sackrison, Employment Security Department.