

# HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

## HB 2084

**Brief Description:** Regulating vocational rehabilitation benefits.

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**Sponsors:** Representatives Cole and McMorris

Hearing: February 26, 1997

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Department of Labor and Industries is authorized to pay, and may direct self-insured employers to pay, the costs of vocational rehabilitation services for injured workers when these services are necessary and likely to enable the injured worker to become employable at gainful employment. These costs are limited to \$3,000 in a 52-week period and include the cost of books, tuition, fees, supplies, equipment, transportation, child or dependent care, and other necessary expenses. The department may extend the period of benefits for an additional 52 weeks.

As part of a vocational rehabilitation plan, a worker may participate in unpaid on-the-job training or transition return-to-work training. The department has not considered this activity to be "employment." Under the industrial insurance act, if the activity was "employment" excluded from coverage, the employer would be permitted to elect coverage by filing a written notice with the department.

Special department rules apply when an injured worker suffers further injury in covered employment. Under these rules, the department may reduce or eliminate premiums or charges against the injured worker's subsequent employer.

### **SUMMARY OF BILL:**

The amount that the Department of Labor and Industries may spend in a 52-week period for an injured worker's vocational rehabilitation benefits is increased from \$3,000 to \$3,750.

A person who provides on-the-job training or transitional return to work rehabilitation for injured workers may elect to cover these workers under industrial insurance, regardless of whether the person pays a wage to the workers. The department's rules that reduce or eliminate premiums or charges against employers in the case of further injury to injured workers apply to workers for whom coverage has been elected under this new authority.

**RULES AUTHORITY:** This bill does not contain provisions addressing the rule-making powers of an agency.

**FISCAL NOTE:** Requested February 22, 1997.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.