

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6171

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Labor & Workforce Development, February 3, 2000

Title: An act relating to unemployment compensation payable to individuals who took family and medical leave.

Brief Description: Modifying unemployment compensation payable to individuals who took family and medical leave.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley, Thibaudeau and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Labor & Workforce Development: 1/13/2000, 2/3/2000 [DP, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Franklin, Vice Chair; Kline and Wojahn.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Hochstatter.

Staff: Jill Reinmuth (786-7452)

Background: An individual's unemployment compensation is based, in part, on wages paid to the individual during the base year. An individual's maximum benefits payable and weekly benefit amount may be reduced if the individual took unpaid family and medical leave during the base year. The Employment Security Department generally calculates an individual's unemployment compensation using the first four of the last five completed calendar quarters as the base year.

Summary of Bill: If an individual took unpaid family and medical leave during the base year, the individual may request that the Employment Security Department calculate the individual's unemployment compensation using four calendar quarters in which the individual did not take family and medical leave. These four quarters include quarters in the base year and immediately preceding the base year in which the individual did not take family and medical leave.

"Family and medical leave" is defined as leave taken under either the federal Family and Medical Leave Act or the state family leave law.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 2, 2000, for new claims filed after July 1, 2000.

Testimony For: It is not equitable for the unemployment compensation system to penalize an individual who takes leave and then becomes unemployed. This inequity should be corrected. This measure is narrowly tailored. The unemployment compensation system is among the most solvent in the country.

Testimony Against: Benefits are already among the highest in the country. Benefits should not be increased. The costs of this measure and others add up. Another dollar in benefits is another dollar in taxes.

The unemployment compensation is not a welfare system. The unemployment compensation system needs comprehensive reform. This measure should be considered in the context of comprehensive reform.

Testified: PRO: Majken Ryherd, Northwest Women's Law Center; Lonnie Johns-Brown, National Organization of Women; Jeff Johnson, Robbie Stern, Washington State Labor Council; CON: Jan Gee, Washington Food Industry and Washington Retail Association; Gary Smith, Independent Business Association; Ken Johnson, Association of Washington Business; Dick Ducharme, Wenatchee Valley Traffic Association, Yakima Growers and Shippers, and Building Industry Association of Washington.