

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

HB 1901

Brief Description: Allowing wage payments from the general fund for unemployed victims of domestic violence.

Sponsors: Clements and Skinner

Hearing: February 24, 1999

Brief Summary of Bill

- Victims of domestic violence are given up to 12 weeks of wage payments if they leave their jobs due to domestic violence, or are denied unemployment insurance due to their inability to search for work because of domestic violence.
- The wage payments are made from the general fund.

BACKGROUND:

Unemployment insurance benefits are available to those who qualify. In order to qualify, a person must be able to work, available for work, and actively seeking work. Current law describes what it means to be actively seeking work and available for work.

In addition, a person is disqualified from benefits if he or she left work voluntarily without "good cause.— Good cause may be established under some circumstances: quitting to accept a bona fide job offer; quitting because of illness or disability of a claimant or because of illness, disability, or death of a member of the claimant's immediate family; or quitting to relocate for the spouse's employment outside the existing labor market area.

Disqualifications for voluntarily leaving work remain in effect for a minimum of five weeks and until work has been obtained with earnings of at least five times the weekly benefit amount.

SUMMARY OF BILL:

Prepared for the House Commerce & Labor Committee
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The Employment Security Department will administer a program to provide wage subsidy payments to unemployed victims of domestic violence. Funds for the program will be appropriated from the general fund.

To be eligible for the wage payments, an individual must have been denied unemployment benefits due to voluntarily leaving employment because of domestic violence, or because the individual is unable to look for work due to domestic violence.

In addition, applicants for wage payments must document that they have been victims of domestic violence within the past two years and are currently seeking help. The department will document whether an applicant has been subject to domestic violence by examining medical, court, police, or counselor records. The applicant can establish that he or she is currently seeking help by showing that he or she is relocating, attempting to relocate, obtaining medical treatment, pursuing legal remedies, or participating in counseling for victims of domestic violence.

The amount of a subsidy an eligible person may receive will be equal to the amount of benefits the person would receive under the unemployment insurance program. Similarly, the payments will continue for as long as the person would receive benefits under the unemployment insurance program, but no longer than 12 weeks. The person is not required to actively seek work during this time.

An otherwise eligible applicant may receive four weeks of payments while the department is attempting to document that the applicant has been a victim of domestic violence in the past two years.

The department will provide applicants information about shelter, counseling, and legal services available to domestic violence victims. All information collected by the department to determine eligibility will remain confidential.

The payments made by the program will not effect employers' experience rating or contribution amount.

APPROPRIATION: \$600,000.

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

FISCAL NOTE: Requested February 19, 1999.

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