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**SENATE BILL 5193**

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**State of Washington**

**67th Legislature**

**2021 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Conway, Keiser, Hasegawa, and Wilson, C.

Read first time 01/13/21. Referred to Committee on Labor, Commerce & Tribal Affairs.

1 AN ACT Relating to unemployment insurance claim adjudicators;  
2 adding a new section to chapter 51.12 RCW; and creating a new  
3 section.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds with roughly  
6 \$4,700,000,000 in the state unemployment insurance trust fund,  
7 Washington entered the COVID-19 pandemic with one of the strongest  
8 and well-funded trust funds in the nation. During an unprecedented  
9 time, the state's unemployment insurance trust fund provided critical  
10 economic support to Washington workers and businesses through  
11 unemployment benefits and helped bolster the state's economy.

12 The legislature recognizes that the employment security  
13 department maintains a recession readiness team that prepares the  
14 agency to respond to economic changes, helping employers and  
15 employees plan for the future. Based on experience with past  
16 recessions, the employment security department's readiness team  
17 prepared contingency plans preparing for an economic crisis. During  
18 the great recession, there were approximately 61,000 continued  
19 unemployment insurance claims in September 2008, and hit a high of  
20 approximately 173,000 claims in January of 2010, a period of 16  
21 months. During the first three months of COVID-19, unemployment

1 insurance claims were more than double than during the great  
2 recession, a time period that was seven times longer. From February  
3 2020 to April 2020, unemployment insurance claims went from  
4 approximately 62,000 to approximately 447,000 claims. The sudden  
5 magnitude of claimants overwhelmed the system; contributing to  
6 Washingtonians waiting months for their earned benefits and facing  
7 deep economic insecurity.

8 The legislature further finds that a federal retroactive funding  
9 model that looks back instead of preparing for potential economic  
10 shocks ahead was a major contributing factor to the challenges faced  
11 by all states during the COVID-19 pandemic in quickly paying benefits  
12 to unemployed workers. Our employment security department cannot  
13 quickly scale up for increased workloads and new programs if its  
14 administrative funding is based on funding that looks backward  
15 instead of forward.

16 Amid an unprecedented need for benefits and stresses on our  
17 unemployment insurance program, the legislature intends to create a  
18 pool of qualified unemployment insurance claim adjudicators. A stable  
19 pool of adjudicators will ensure quicker claim resolution and benefit  
20 payment; thus providing critical economic support during future  
21 unemployment crises.

22 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 51.12  
23 RCW to read as follows:

24 (1) The employment security department must create an annual  
25 training program to train qualified persons to perform as  
26 unemployment insurance claim adjudicators.

27 (2) The program must:

28 (a) Be open to both state and other public employees and private  
29 citizens;

30 (b) Be of sufficient quality that persons completing the training  
31 and any required continuing education would be ready to work as an  
32 unemployment insurance claim adjudicator within one week of  
33 commencing employment with the employment security department; and

34 (c) Provide a certification of completion to participants who  
35 complete the program.

36 (3) The office of financial management must collaborate with the  
37 employment security department to provide opportunities for state  
38 employees, who meet the minimum qualifications to work as an

1 unemployment insurance claim adjudicator, to participate in the  
2 annual trainings.

3 (4) By October 1, 2021, and each year thereafter, the employment  
4 security department must provide a report to the house of  
5 representatives committee on labor and workplace standards and the  
6 senate committee on labor, commerce, and tribal affairs, or successor  
7 committees, on the number of persons with current certifications  
8 under subsection (2)(c) of this section.

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