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**SENATE BILL 6348**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2020 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Keiser, Conway, Schoesler, Padden, and King; by request of Employment Security Department

AN ACT Relating to granting relief of unemployment benefit charges when discharge is required by law and removing outdated statutory language; amending RCW 50.12.200, 50.20.190, 50.29.021, 50.50.070, and 50A.05.070; creating a new section; and repealing RCW 50.29.020.

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

**Sec.**  RCW 50.12.200 and 1982 1st ex.s. c 18 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The commissioner shall appoint a state advisory council composed of not more than nine men and women, of which three shall be representatives of employers, three shall be representatives of employees, and three shall be representatives of the general public. Such council shall aid the commissioner in formulating policies and discussing problems related to the administration of this title and of assuring impartiality and freedom from political influence in the solution of such problems. The council shall serve without compensation. The commissioner may also appoint committees, and industrial or other special councils, to perform appropriate services. Advisory councilmembers shall be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred in accordance with RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060 as now existing or hereafter amended.

(2) Beginning in 2021 and ending in 2030, the commissioner shall annually report to the state advisory council the amount of benefits that were not charged to employers as a direct consequence of RCW 50.29.021(3)(a)(vii).

**Sec.**  RCW 50.20.190 and 2013 c 189 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) An individual who is paid any amount as benefits under this title to which he or she is not entitled shall, unless otherwise relieved pursuant to this section, be liable for repayment of the amount overpaid. The department shall issue an overpayment assessment setting forth the reasons for and the amount of the overpayment. The amount assessed, to the extent not collected, may be deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual: PROVIDED, That in the absence of a back pay award, a settlement affecting the allowance of benefits, fraud, misrepresentation, or willful nondisclosure, every determination of liability shall be mailed or personally served not later than two years after the close of or final payment made on the individual's applicable benefit year for which the purported overpayment was made, whichever is later, unless the merits of the claim are subjected to administrative or judicial review in which event the period for serving the determination of liability shall be extended to allow service of the determination of liability during the six-month period following the final decision affecting the claim.

(2) The commissioner may waive an overpayment if the commissioner finds that the overpayment was not the result of fraud, misrepresentation, willful nondisclosure, or fault attributable to the individual and that the recovery thereof would be against equity and good conscience. When determining whether the recovery would be against equity and good conscience, the department must consider whether the employer or employer's agent failed to respond timely and adequately to a written request of the department for information relating to the claim or claims without establishing good cause for the failure pursuant to RCW 50.29.021((~~(6)~~)) (5). An overpayment waived under this subsection shall be charged against the individual's applicable entitlement for the eligibility period containing the weeks to which the overpayment was attributed as though such benefits had been properly paid.

(3) Any assessment herein provided shall constitute a determination of liability from which an appeal may be had in the same manner and to the same extent as provided for appeals relating to determinations in respect to claims for benefits: PROVIDED, That an appeal from any determination covering overpayment only shall be deemed to be an appeal from the determination which was the basis for establishing the overpayment unless the merits involved in the issue set forth in such determination have already been heard and passed upon by the appeal tribunal. If no such appeal is taken to the appeal tribunal by the individual within thirty days of the delivery of the notice of determination of liability, or within thirty days of the mailing of the notice of determination, whichever is the earlier, the determination of liability shall be deemed conclusive and final. Whenever any such notice of determination of liability becomes conclusive and final, the commissioner, upon giving at least twenty days' notice, using a method by which the mailing can be tracked or the delivery can be confirmed, may file with the superior court clerk of any county within the state a warrant in the amount of the notice of determination of liability plus a filing fee under RCW 36.18.012(10). The clerk of the county where the warrant is filed shall immediately designate a superior court cause number for the warrant, and the clerk shall cause to be entered in the judgment docket under the superior court cause number assigned to the warrant, the name of the person(s) mentioned in the warrant, the amount of the notice of determination of liability, and the date when the warrant was filed. The amount of the warrant as docketed shall become a lien upon the title to, and any interest in, all real and personal property of the person(s) against whom the warrant is issued, the same as a judgment in a civil case duly docketed in the office of such clerk. A warrant so docketed shall be sufficient to support the issuance of writs of execution and writs of garnishment in favor of the state in the manner provided by law for a civil judgment. A copy of the warrant shall be mailed within five days of its filing with the clerk to the person(s) mentioned in the warrant using a method by which the mailing can be tracked or the delivery can be confirmed.

(4) On request of any agency which administers an employment security law of another state, the United States, or a foreign government and which has found in accordance with the provisions of such law that a claimant is liable to repay benefits received under such law, the commissioner may collect the amount of such benefits from the claimant to be refunded to the agency. In any case in which under this section a claimant is liable to repay any amount to the agency of another state, the United States, or a foreign government, such amounts may be collected without interest by civil action in the name of the commissioner acting as agent for such agency if the other state, the United States, or the foreign government extends such collection rights to the employment security department of the state of Washington, and provided that the court costs be paid by the governmental agency benefiting from such collection.

(5) Any employer who is a party to a back pay award or settlement due to loss of wages shall, within thirty days of the award or settlement, report to the department the amount of the award or settlement, the name and social security number of the recipient of the award or settlement, and the period for which it is awarded. When an individual has been awarded or receives back pay, for benefit purposes the amount of the back pay shall constitute wages paid in the period for which it was awarded. For contribution purposes, the back pay award or settlement shall constitute wages paid in the period in which it was actually paid. The following requirements shall also apply:

(a) The employer shall reduce the amount of the back pay award or settlement by an amount determined by the department based upon the amount of unemployment benefits received by the recipient of the award or settlement during the period for which the back pay award or settlement was awarded;

(b) The employer shall pay to the unemployment compensation fund, in a manner specified by the commissioner, an amount equal to the amount of such reduction;

(c) The employer shall also pay to the department any taxes due for unemployment insurance purposes on the entire amount of the back pay award or settlement notwithstanding any reduction made pursuant to (a) of this subsection;

(d) If the employer fails to reduce the amount of the back pay award or settlement as required in (a) of this subsection, the department shall issue an overpayment assessment against the recipient of the award or settlement in the amount that the back pay award or settlement should have been reduced; and

(e) If the employer fails to pay to the department an amount equal to the reduction as required in (b) of this subsection, the department shall issue an assessment of liability against the employer which shall be collected pursuant to the procedures for collection of assessments provided herein and in RCW 50.24.110.

(6) When an individual fails to repay an overpayment assessment that is due and fails to arrange for satisfactory repayment terms, the commissioner shall impose an interest penalty of one percent per month of the outstanding balance. Interest shall accrue immediately on overpayments assessed pursuant to RCW 50.20.070 and shall be imposed when the assessment becomes final. For any other overpayment, interest shall accrue when the individual has missed two or more of the individual's monthly payments either partially or in full.

(7) The department shall: (a) Conduct social security number cross-match audits or engage in other more effective activities that ensure that individuals are entitled to all amounts of benefits that they are paid; and (b) engage in other detection and recovery of overpayment and collection activities.

**Sec.**  RCW 50.29.021 and 2019 c 13 s 65 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) ((~~This section applies to benefits charged to the experience rating accounts of employers for claims that have an effective date on or after January 4, 2004.~~

~~(2)~~))(a) An experience rating account shall be established and maintained for each employer, except employers as described in RCW 50.44.010, 50.44.030, and 50.50.030 who have properly elected to make payments in lieu of contributions, taxable local government employers as described in RCW 50.44.035, and those employers who are required to make payments in lieu of contributions, based on existing records of the employment security department.

(b) Benefits paid to an eligible individual shall be charged to the experience rating accounts of each of such individual's employers during the individual's base year in the same ratio that the wages paid by each employer to the individual during the base year bear to the wages paid by all employers to that individual during that base year, except as otherwise provided in this section.

(c) When the eligible individual's separating employer is a covered contribution paying base year employer, benefits paid to the eligible individual shall be charged to the experience rating account of only the individual's separating employer if the individual qualifies for benefits under:

(i) RCW 50.20.050 (1)(b)(i) or (2)(b)(i), as applicable, and became unemployed after having worked and earned wages in the bona fide work; or

(ii) RCW 50.20.050 (1)(b) (v) through (x) or (2)(b) (v) through (x).

((~~(3)~~)) (2) The legislature finds that certain benefit payments, in whole or in part, should not be charged to the experience rating accounts of employers except those employers described in RCW 50.44.010, 50.44.030, and 50.50.030 who have properly elected to make payments in lieu of contributions, taxable local government employers described in RCW 50.44.035, and those employers who are required to make payments in lieu of contributions, as follows:

(a) Benefits paid to any individual later determined to be ineligible shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer, except as provided in subsection ((~~(5)~~)) (4) of this section.

(b) Benefits paid to an individual filing under the provisions of chapter 50.06 RCW shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer only if:

(i) The individual files under RCW 50.06.020(1) after receiving crime victims' compensation for a disability resulting from a nonwork-related occurrence; or

(ii) The individual files under RCW 50.06.020(2).

(c) Benefits paid which represent the state's share of benefits payable as extended benefits defined under RCW 50.22.010(6) shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer.

(d) In the case of individuals who requalify for benefits under RCW 50.20.050 or 50.20.060, benefits based on wage credits earned prior to the disqualifying separation shall not be charged to the experience rating account of the contribution paying employer from whom that separation took place.

(e) Benefits paid to an individual who qualifies for benefits under RCW 50.20.050 (1)(b) (iv) or (xi) or (2)(b) (iv) or (xi), as applicable, shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer.

(f) With respect to claims with an effective date on or after the first Sunday following April 22, 2005, benefits paid that exceed the benefits that would have been paid if the weekly benefit amount for the claim had been determined as one percent of the total wages paid in the individual's base year shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer. This subsection ((~~(3)~~)) (2)(f) does not apply to the calculation of contribution rates under RCW 50.29.025 for rate year 2010 and thereafter.

(g) The forty-five dollar increase paid as part of an individual's weekly benefit amount as provided in RCW 50.20.1201 and the twenty-five dollar increase paid as part of an individual's weekly benefit amount as provided in RCW 50.20.1202 shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer.

(h) With respect to claims where the minimum amount payable weekly is increased to one hundred fifty-five dollars pursuant to RCW 50.20.1201(3), benefits paid that exceed the benefits that would have been paid if the minimum amount payable weekly had been calculated pursuant to RCW 50.20.120 shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer.

(i) Upon approval of an individual's training benefits plan submitted in accordance with RCW 50.22.155(2), an individual is considered enrolled in training, and regular benefits beginning with the week of approval shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer.

(j) Training benefits paid to an individual under RCW 50.22.155 shall not be charged to the experience rating account of any contribution paying employer.

((~~(4)~~)) (3)(a) A contribution paying base year employer, except employers as provided in subsection ((~~(6)~~)) (5) of this section, not otherwise eligible for relief of charges for benefits under this section, may receive such relief if the benefit charges result from payment to an individual who:

(i) Last left the employ of such employer voluntarily for reasons not attributable to the employer;

(ii) Was discharged for misconduct or gross misconduct connected with his or her work not a result of inability to meet the minimum job requirements;

(iii) Is unemployed as a result of closure or severe curtailment of operation at the employer's plant, building, worksite, or other facility. This closure must be for reasons directly attributable to a catastrophic occurrence such as fire, flood, or other natural disaster;

(iv) Continues to be employed on a regularly scheduled permanent part-time basis by a base year employer and who at some time during the base year was concurrently employed and subsequently separated from at least one other base year employer. Benefit charge relief ceases when the employment relationship between the employer requesting relief and the claimant is terminated. This subsection does not apply to shared work employers under chapter 50.60 RCW;

(v) Continues to be employed on a regularly scheduled permanent part-time basis by a base year employer and who qualified for two consecutive unemployment claims where wages were attributable to at least one employer who employed the individual in both base years. Benefit charge relief ceases when the employment relationship between the employer requesting relief and the claimant is terminated. This subsection does not apply to shared work employers under chapter 50.60 RCW;

(vi) Was hired to replace an employee who is a member of the military reserves or National Guard and was called to federal active military service by the president of the United States and is subsequently laid off when that employee is reemployed by their employer upon release from active duty within the time provided for reemployment in RCW 73.16.035; ((~~or~~))

(vii) Worked for an employer for twenty weeks or less, and was laid off at the end of temporary employment when that employee temporarily replaced a permanent employee receiving family or medical leave benefits under Title 50A RCW, and the layoff is due to the return of that permanent employee. This subsection ((~~(4)~~)) (3)(a)(vii) applies to claims with an effective date on or after January 1, 2020; or

(viii) Was discharged because the individual was unable to satisfy a job prerequisite required by law or administrative rule.

(b) The employer requesting relief of charges under this subsection must request relief in writing within thirty days following mailing to the last known address of the notification of the valid initial determination of such claim, stating the date and reason for the separation or the circumstances of continued employment. The commissioner, upon investigation of the request, shall determine whether relief should be granted.

((~~(5)~~)) (4) When a benefit claim becomes invalid due to an amendment or adjustment of a report where the employer failed to report or inaccurately reported hours worked or remuneration paid, or both, all benefits paid will be charged to the experience rating account of the contribution paying employer or employers that originally filed the incomplete or inaccurate report or reports. An employer who reimburses the trust fund for benefits paid to workers and who fails to report or inaccurately reported hours worked or remuneration paid, or both, shall reimburse the trust fund for all benefits paid that are based on the originally filed incomplete or inaccurate report or reports.

((~~(6)~~)) (5) An employer's experience rating account may not be relieved of charges for a benefit payment and an employer who reimburses the trust fund for benefit payments may not be credited for a benefit payment if a benefit payment was made because the employer or employer's agent failed to respond timely or adequately to a written request of the department for information relating to the claim or claims without establishing good cause for the failure and the employer or employer's agent has a pattern of such failures. The commissioner has the authority to determine whether the employer has good cause under this subsection.

(a) For the purposes of this subsection, "adequately" means providing accurate information of sufficient quantity and quality that would allow a reasonable person to determine eligibility for benefits.

(b)(i) For the purposes of this subsection, "pattern" means a benefit payment was made because the employer or employer's agent failed to respond timely or adequately to a written request of the department for information relating to a claim or claims without establishing good cause for the failure, if the greater of the following calculations for an employer is met:

(A) At least three times in the previous two years; or

(B) Twenty percent of the total current claims against the employer.

(ii) If an employer's agent is utilized, a pattern is established based on each individual client employer that the employer's agent represents.

**Sec.**  RCW 50.50.070 and 2001 1st sp.s. c 11 s 9 are each amended to read as follows:

Unless specifically addressed in this chapter, Indian tribes or their tribal units are subject to the same terms and conditions as are other employers subject to contributions under ((~~RCW 50.29.020~~)) 50.29.021 or other units of government under RCW 50.44.030 that make payments in lieu of contributions.

**Sec.**  RCW 50A.05.070 and 2019 c 13 s 34 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The family and medical leave insurance account is created in the custody of the state treasurer. All receipts from premiums imposed under this title must be deposited in the account. Expenditures from the account may be used only for the purposes of the family and medical leave program. Only the commissioner or the commissioner's designee may authorize expenditures from the account. The account is subject to the allotment procedures under chapter 43.88 RCW. An appropriation is required for administrative expenses, but not for benefit payments.

(2) Money deposited in the account shall remain a part of the account until expended pursuant to the requirements of this title or transferred in accordance with subsection (3) of this section. The commissioner shall maintain a separate record of the deposit, obligation, expenditure, and return of funds so deposited. Any money so deposited which either will not be obligated within the period specified by the appropriations act or remains unobligated at the end of the period, and any money which has been obligated within the period but will not be expended, shall be returned promptly to the family and medical leave insurance account.

(3) Money shall be transferred from the family and medical leave insurance account and deposited in the unemployment trust fund solely for the repayment of benefits not charged to employers as defined in RCW 50.29.021((~~(4)~~)) (3)(a)(vii). The commissioner shall direct the transfer, which must occur on or before the cut-off date as defined in RCW 50.29.010.

(4) Money transferred as provided in subsection (3) of this section for the repayment of benefits not charged to employers shall be deposited in the unemployment compensation fund and shall remain a part of the unemployment compensation fund until expended pursuant to RCW 50.16.030. The commissioner shall maintain a separate record of the deposit, obligation, expenditure, and return of funds so deposited. Any money so deposited which either will not be obligated within the period specified by the appropriation law or remains unobligated at the end of the period, and any money which has been obligated within the period but will not be expended, shall be returned promptly to the account of this state in the unemployment trust fund.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  RCW 50.29.020 (Experience rating accounts—Benefits not charged—Claims with an effective date before January 4, 2004) and 2004 c 110 s 3 & 2003 2nd sp.s. c 4 s 20 are each repealed.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  If any part of this act is found to be in conflict with federal requirements that are a prescribed condition to the allocation of federal funds to the state or the eligibility of employers in this state for federal unemployment tax credits, the conflicting part of this act is inoperative solely to the extent of the conflict, and the finding or determination does not affect the operation of the remainder of this act. Rules adopted under this act must meet federal requirements that are a necessary condition to the receipt of federal funds by the state or the granting of federal unemployment tax credits to employers in this state.

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