Washington State
House of Representatives
Office of Program Research

BILL ANALYSIS

Labor & Workplace Standards Committee

HB 1682

Brief Description: Concerning part-time workers in the unemployment insurance system.

Sponsors: Representatives Ortiz-Self, Berry, Simmons, Gregerson, Doglio, Reed, Scott and Pollet.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the definition of part-time worker in the unemployment insurance system to include any worker who worked an average number of weekly hours that the prior employer considers to be less than full-time work.
- Allows a part-time worker who is available for and willing to accept a position with comparable hours to his or her prior employment to be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.
- Allows a full-time worker who becomes unavailable for full-time work to remain eligible for unemployment insurance benefits based on certain factors.

Hearing Date: 2/11/25

Staff: Kelly Leonard (786-7147).

Background:

The unemployment insurance (UI) system, administered by the Employment Security Department (ESD), is designed to provide partial wage replacement for unemployed workers. A worker is eligible to receive benefits if he or she: worked at least 680 hours in covered

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employment in his or her base year; was separated from employment through no fault of his or her own or quit work for good cause; and is available to work and is actively searching for suitable work.

To be considered available for work, the worker must be available for work for at least 40 hours during the week during the hours customary for his or her trade or occupation, and must be willing to accept suitable full-time, part-time, and temporary work during those hours. However, this requirement does not apply to part-time workers. A person is a part-time worker if he or she was employed for at least 40 works in the base year but did not did not earn wages for more than 17 hours per week in any week. A part-time worker must be available for and willing to accept work of 17 or fewer hours per week, and may otherwise refuse any job requiring 18 or more hours per week.

The amount of an eligible worker's benefits is calculated based on his or her earnings in the prior base year and then adjusted based on a statutory formula. The current maximum weekly benefit amount is $1,079. The UI system is funded by taxes and payments made by employers. Most employers are contribution-paying employers, referred to as taxable employers. For this category, benefits are financed through employer contributions, referred to as payroll taxes. An employer's contributions are determined by multiple factors, including an experience rating based on the benefits paid to its employees. State and local governments, federally recognized tribes, and some nonprofit organizations qualify as reimbursable employers. For reimbursable employers, the employer reimburses the ESD for benefits actually paid to separated employees instead of paying payroll taxes.

Summary of Bill:

The requirements governing availability for certain hours of work are modified for unemployment insurance claims effective on or after August 3, 2025.

A person is a part-time worker if he or she was employed for at least 40 weeks in the worker's base year, and worked an average number of weekly hours that the employer considers to be less than full time. A part-time worker must be available for and willing to accept an average number of weekly hours comparable to or more than the worker's average number of weekly hours in the worker's base year.

If a worker is not a part-time worker, he or she may not be disqualified for being unavailable for full-time work if:

- the worker has become unable to work full-time as a result of illness or disability of himself, herself, or a family member, the death of a family member, the inaccessibility of care for a child or a vulnerable adult, the need for protection against domestic violence or stalking, or other circumstances beyond the individual's control; and
- the worker is available for and is willing to accept an average of 20 or more weekly hours per week.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 7, 2025.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.