

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

SB 5631

Brief Description: Increasing the amount of allowable vocational rehabilitation benefits.

Sponsors: Senators Wojahn and Heavey

Hearing: April 2, 1999

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases from \$3,000 to \$4,000 the maximum amount that may be paid in a year for vocational rehabilitation benefits (applies to all new and open industrial insurance claims).
- Excludes an injured worker's transportation costs from being subject to the new benefit limit.

BACKGROUND:

The Department of Labor and Industries is authorized to pay, and may direct self-insured employers to pay, the costs of vocational rehabilitation services for injured workers when these services are necessary and likely to enable the injured worker to become employable at gainful employment. These costs are limited to \$3,000 in a 52-week period and include the cost of books, tuition, fees, supplies, equipment, transportation, child or dependent care, and other necessary expenses. The department may extend the period of benefits for an additional 52 weeks.

SUMMARY OF BILL:

The maximum amount that the Department of Labor and Industries may pay, or order a self-insurer to pay, for an injured worker's vocational rehabilitation benefits in a 52-week period is increased from \$3,000 to \$4,000. (The new limit also applies if a second year of benefits is authorized.)

The expenditure limit does not apply to the injured worker's transportation costs.

(These benefit changes apply to all industrial insurance claims, except that a claim may not be opened solely for vocational rehabilitation purposes.)

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

FISCAL NOTE: Available.

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