



2024 Agency Request Bills

January 2024

Summaries

The Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) is seeking support for four request bills in the 2024 legislative session. They are:

HB 2127 (Schmidt) - Increasing Workers' Comp Incentives for Return to Work Activities

This proposal would expand incentives to return a workers' comp claimant to work, consistent with their medical restrictions. It would better align system incentives to make it easy for employers to bring injured workers back to safe and sustainable jobs and to help workers make the decision to return to work. It enhances incentives and training options for:

- **Stay at Work** program, increasing what an employer may receive in reimbursement for creating a light duty job to a maximum of half the wages paid to a worker for up to 120 workdays, capped at \$25k. These are increased from the current 66 workdays and a cap of \$10k. The continuous employment bonus is increased from \$10k to \$25k. In addition, reimbursement for:
 - Tuition, books, fees and materials required for light duty is increased from \$1k to \$2k;
 - Clothing required for light duty is increased from \$400 to \$1k; and
 - Tools required for light duty is increased from \$2,500 to \$5k.
- **Job modification** costs, increasing the amount an employer may be eligible to receive when a job is modified to accommodate retaining or hiring workers with disabilities resulting from work-related injury. Current amount is capped at \$5k and has been unchanged since 1982. This would increase the cap to \$10k. No changes to fund sources are made: Job modifications are paid from the 2nd Injury Fund and reimbursed by the Medical Aid Fund; Pre-job modifications are paid from the Accident Fund and charged to the employer of injury.
- **Vocational retraining** benefits, allowing the department to provide up to an additional 25% once per claim of total vocational award during vocational recovery and assessment so that workers can participate in approved basic skills training (such as English language training, computer literacy, and completion of a GED) to improve labor market readiness and to enable workers to benefit from other return to work services. This award is funded through the Stay at Work premium and would be optional for any eligible worker.

SB 5886 (Braun)/HB 1986 (Abbarno) - Adding Flexibility for FIIRE Program Grants to be used for Training Purposes

This proposal would expand the use of the existing Firefighter Injury and Illness Reduction (FIIRE) Grant Program to include expenditures for safety training and assessments. These grants are part of the FIIRE Initiative Pilot, a safety initiative to reduce incidence of firefighter occupational injuries and illnesses through proactive risk management and implementation of best practices. The FIIRE Grant Program currently provides funding to FIIRE pilot program participants to purchase equipment or gear to mitigate exposure to carcinogens or work-related musculoskeletal disorders.

The proposal would not change the amount of funding available, but would expand its use to include assessments and training related to safety within those best practices. Funding is shared by all Accident Fund and Medical Aid Fund premiums. The amount awarded in 2023 was about \$670k.

SB 5952 (Schoesler) - Aligning Boiler Inspector Credentials with National Standards

This proposal would align minimum employment qualifications for boiler inspectors hired by L&I with national standards and those performing work as “special” inspectors employed by private insurance companies and owner-user inspection organizations.

L&I currently inspects about 17,000 boilers and unfired pressure vessels each year with 11 inspector positions. A boiler or unfired pressure vessel is a closed, pressurized container that stores potentially explosive energy. These range from common hot water heaters to five-story utility boilers.

In addition to inspections conducted by L&I, private insurance companies and owner-users also employ special inspectors. L&I inspectors review inspections performed by special inspectors prior to issuing the operating certificate. Overall, roughly 58,000 inspections are conducted in Washington each year.

SB 6089 (King) - Removing Engineering School as a Minimum Requirement to be an Electrical Inspector

This proposal removes language allowing a combination of electrical engineer training and certain years of work to meet the minimum employment qualifications for state and local electrical inspectors.

There are currently 28 local jurisdictions and L&I that employ electrical inspectors. All electrical inspectors working, whether state or local, are subject to the same qualifications for hire. There are currently four pathways:

- Four years of experience as a journeylevel electrician, which includes at least 4 years of experience learning the trade plus 4 additional years working in Washington; or
- Four years of experience as a journeylevel electrician working for the department or a local jurisdiction; or
- Four years of electrical training in a college of electrical engineering and 2 years of electrical installation work; or
- Two years of electrical training in a college of electrical engineering and 4 years of electrical installation work.

This proposal would eliminate the confusing options that may allow a student, whether they complete their electrical engineering program or have ever performed journeylevel electrical work, to qualify to be an inspector. It would make the minimum requirements for hire clearer and ensure all electrical inspectors have sufficient knowledge and experience to recognize unsafe installations.

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