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RE: HB-0346

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Delegate Pruski and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

I am writing this letter to express **strong support of HB-0346** requiring an employer-insurer to pay retroactive compensation to a covered employee during the period between the date maximum medical improvement (MMI) was attained and the date vocational rehabilitation services began.

As a Maryland Certified Rehabilitation Services Practitioner with the Maryland Workers' Compensation Commission [Practitioner #: N2422] for the past 14 years, I have seen numerous injured workers at the time of my initial vocational assessment who have been significantly financially impacted by the current statute in which their temporary total benefits can be terminated effective with an MMI determination.

If there is an extensive time gap between MMI determination and the start for vocational rehabilitation (VR), the financial impact can be so great that it creates the inability to prioritize or effectively participate in VR, which is counterproductive. In my experience, the financial strain caused by months without monetary benefits can result in claimants having their cars repossessed, being in danger or having already been evicted from their residence, and/or having their utilities or phone service turned off. When this occurs, the injured worker, who already has barriers to securing employment due to physical/medical limitations related to the work injury, is then presenting to us for vocational rehabilitation with far more barriers which may include: having no access to reliable transportation, having no internet services in their home required for job search, and/or having no working phone required for communication with us and potential employers. If these financial limitations are substantial enough, we are at times requesting the employer-insurer authorize an advance subject to credit against the claimant's permanency award to allow the claimant's participation in VR, which is again counterproductive. The retroactive compensation proposed by HB-0346 would allow the injured worker to catch up on their financial obligations and remove these additional barriers at the start of VR, allowing them to better focus and prioritize the goals of VR.

If and when there is a time gap between MMI determination and the initial vocational assessment meeting, in my experience, this is typically not the fault of the injured worker, although the financial burden ultimately falls on them.

For these reasons, I am in strong support of HB-0346.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.



SHELBY DUBATO

Managing Member

MCRSP, CCM, CDMS, CLCP, CRC

WCC Practitioner #: N2422

WCC Provider #: 165

Member of the Maryland Workers' Compensation Educational Association

Member of the Advisory Committee on the Budget of the Workers' Compensation Commission