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From the Governor's Office:

Gov. Gregoire Signs Bill To Improve Workers Compensation System

Legislation expected to save \$218 million over the next four years.

Governor Chris Gregoire this afternoon signed Senate Bill 5801, which directs the Department of Labor and Industries to create a statewide provider network for injured workers, as well as expand access to the state's Centers for Occupational Health Education. The legislation is expected to save \$218 million over the next four years.

"We know we need to help more workers return to good health and back on the job after an injury, as well as reduce costs for our taxpayers and businesses," Gregoire said. "This bill does both. It improves outcomes for our employees, while saving more than \$200 million over the next four years. I'm proud of our workers compensation workgroup, which pulled together leaders from our business and labor communities. This bill is the result of their work, and it has strong bi-partisan support."

Under the bill, Labor and Industries, with the help of health care provider groups and associations, will establish a statewide network of doctors and providers that meet certain standards or credentials and use best practices to prevent disability, reduce loss of family income, and lower labor and insurance costs for employers. Injured workers will be able to choose their doctor from those included in the statewide network.

The legislation also directs Labor and Industries to expand the State's Centers for Occupational Health and Education with the goal of extending access to all injured workers by December 2015. The department will also develop electronic methods of tracking evidence-based quality measures and outcomes. These actions will help return more injured workers to work quickly and reduce the number of workers who become long-term disabled.

"Our provider network and occupational health centers help prevent long-term disability by ensuring workers receive the right medical care early," Gregoire said. "That means employees are back on the job quicker – earning a paycheck to support their families. And it will help reduce the amount of future increases in workers' comp premiums. Saving businesses money that they can reinvest in the workforce is essential to our economic recovery."

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