

Fifty-fifth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

HOUSE BILL NO. 1264

Introduced by

Representative Berg

Senator Mutch

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 65-05 of the North Dakota
2 Century Code, ~~to provide for~~ relating to payment of preacceptance disability benefits to an
3 employee who allegedly suffers a work-related injury; to amend and reenact sections 65-05-08,
4 65-05-08.1, 65-05-09, 65-05-10, and 65-06.2-02 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to
5 payment of workers' compensation disability benefits and payments to confined workers; to
6 provide an effective date; and to provide an expiration date.

7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:

8 **SECTION 1. AMENDMENT.** Section 65-05-08 of the North Dakota Century Code is
9 amended and reenacted as follows:

10 **65-05-08. ~~Compensation not~~ Disability benefits - Not paid unless period of**
11 **disability is of five days' duration or more - Application required - Suspended during**
12 **confinement - Duty to report wages.** No ~~compensation~~ benefits may be paid for ~~total or~~
13 ~~partial~~ disability, the duration of which is less than five consecutive calendar days. If the period
14 of ~~total or partial~~ disability is ~~of~~ five consecutive calendar days' duration or ~~more~~ longer,
15 ~~compensation~~ benefits must be paid for the period of disability provided that:

- 16 1. ~~If the period of disability is for not more than fourteen days, disability benefits for~~
17 ~~the first five days may only be paid for days that the employee was scheduled to~~
18 ~~work.~~
- 19 2. When ~~partial or total~~ disability benefits are discontinued, the ~~claimant shall provide~~
20 ~~the bureau written notice of~~ bureau may not begin payment again unless the
21 injured employee files a reapplication for disability benefits on a form supplied by
22 the bureau. In case of reapplication, the award may commence no more than thirty
23 days before the date of reapplication. Disability benefits must be reinstated upon a
24 finding proof by the injured employee that:

- 1 a. The employee has sustained a significant change in the compensable
2 medical condition ~~shown by a preponderance of the evidence;~~
3 b. The employee has ~~provided evidence of~~ sustained an actual wage loss
4 ~~attributable to the work injury~~ caused by the significant change in the
5 compensable medical condition; and
6 c. The employee has not retired or voluntarily withdrawn from the job market as
7 defined in section 65-05-09.3.

8 ~~3.~~ 2. All payments of disability and rehabilitation benefits must be suspended during the
9 period of confinement in excess of seventy-two hours of any employee who is
10 eligible for, or receiving, benefits under this title who is confined in a penitentiary,
11 jail, youth correctional facility, or any other penal institution ~~under conviction and~~
12 ~~sentence unless the employee is receiving permanent total disability benefits or the~~
13 ~~bureau has determined that none of the priority options under subsection 4 of~~
14 ~~section 65-05-1-01 are viable, and the employee has a spouse or child, in which~~
15 ~~case the benefits must be paid directly to such spouse or child. After discharge~~
16 ~~from the institution, payment of the bureau shall pay subsequent disability or~~
17 rehabilitation ~~thereafter due must be paid~~ as the employee otherwise
18 ~~would, but for the provisions of this subsection, otherwise~~ be entitled under this
19 title.

20 ~~4.~~ 3. Any employee who is eligible for, or receiving, disability or rehabilitation benefits
21 under this title shall report any wages earned, from part-time or full-time
22 ~~employment, work from the employer of injury or any other employer~~ any source.
23 ~~Failure~~ If an employee fails to report such wages earned requires, the employee ~~to~~
24 shall refund to the bureau any ~~partial or total~~ disability or vocational rehabilitation
25 benefits overpaid by the bureau for that time period. To facilitate recovery of those
26 benefits, the bureau may offset future benefits ~~otherwise~~ payable, under section
27 65-05-29. ~~If the bureau determines that the failure~~ employee willfully failed to
28 report wages earned ~~was willful,~~ the employee ~~forfeits all further lost time benefits~~
29 ~~otherwise payable under this title for that injury pursuant~~ is subject to the penalties
30 in section 65-05-33. An employee shall report whether the employee has
31 performed work or received wages. The bureau shall periodically provide a form to

1 all injured employees receiving disability or rehabilitation benefits that the injured
2 employee must complete to retain eligibility for further disability or rehabilitation
3 benefits. The form will advise the injured employee of the possible penalties for
4 failure to report any work or activities as required by this section. An injured
5 employee who is receiving disability or vocational rehabilitation benefits must
6 report any work activities to the bureau whether or not the injured employee
7 receives any wages. An injured employee who is receiving disability or vocational
8 rehabilitation benefits also must report any other activity if the injured employee
9 receives any money, including prize winnings, from undertaking that activity,
10 regardless of expenses or whether there is a net profit.

11 5- 4. An employee shall request disability benefits on a ~~lost-time~~ claim form furnished by
12 the bureau. ~~In no case may lost-time~~ Disability benefits may not commence more
13 than one year prior to the date of filing of the initial ~~lost-time~~ claim ~~form~~ for disability
14 benefits.

15 6- 5. The provisions of this section apply to any disability claim asserted against the fund
16 on or after July 1, 1991, irrespective of injury date.

17 6. It is the burden of the employee to show that the inability to obtain employment or
18 to earn as much as the employee earned at the time of injury is due to physical
19 limitation related to the injury, and that any wage loss claimed is the result of the
20 compensable injury.

21 7. If the employee voluntarily limits income or refuses to accept employment suitable
22 to the employee's capacity, offered to or procured for the employee, the employee
23 is not entitled to any disability or vocational rehabilitation benefits during the
24 limitation of income or refusal to accept employment unless the bureau determines
25 the limitation or refusal is justified.

26 8. The bureau may not pay disability benefits unless the loss of earning capacity
27 exceeds ten percent. The injured employee may earn up to ten percent of the
28 employee's preinjury average gross weekly earnings with no reduction in total
29 disability benefits. The employee must report any earnings to the bureau for a
30 determination of whether the employee is within the limit set in this subsection.

9. Upon securing suitable employment, the injured employee shall notify the bureau of the name and address of the employer, the date the employment began, and the amount of wages being received. If the injured employee is receiving disability benefits, the injured employee shall notify the bureau whenever there is a change in work status or wages received.

10. The bureau shall pay to an employee receiving disability benefits a dependency allowance for each child of the employee at the rate of ten dollars per week per child. Effective July 1, 1989, this rate must be paid to each eligible employee regardless of the date of injury.

11. Dependency allowance for the children may be made directly to either parent or guardian at the discretion of the bureau.

SECTION 2. AMENDMENT. Section 65-05-08.1 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

65-05-08.1. Verification of ~~temporary~~ total disability.

1. ~~The claimant's~~ An injured employee's doctor shall certify the period of temporary total disability and the extent of the injured worker's abilities and restrictions upon request of the bureau.
2. A doctor certifying disability shall include in the report filed with the bureau:
 - a. The medical basis established by medical evidence supported by objective medical findings for the certification of disability;
 - b. Whether the employee is totally disabled, ~~from any and all employment, or, if the employee is not totally disabled,~~ whether the employee is able to return to some any employment, including light work or sedentary work and a statement of the employee's restrictions and physical limitations; and
 - c. ~~If the employee is not totally disabled, a statement of the employee's restrictions and physical limitations; and~~
 - d. A professional opinion as to the expected length of, and reason for, the disability.
 - e. d. A doctor may not certify or verify past disability ~~unless the doctor has examined~~ commencing more than sixty days before the doctor's examination

1 ~~of the employee within the previous sixty days and filed those reports required~~
2 ~~by this title.~~

- 3 3. The report must be filed on a form furnished by the bureau, or on any other form
4 acceptable to the bureau.
- 5 4. The ~~claimant~~ injured employee shall ensure that the required reports are filed.
- 6 5. Prior to the expiration of a period of ~~temporary total~~ disability certified by a doctor, if
7 a report certifying an additional period of disability has not been filed, or upon
8 receipt of a report or other evidence indicating an injured employee who is
9 receiving disability benefits has been or will be released to return to work, the
10 bureau shall send a notice to ~~the claimant~~ that employee of the bureau's intention
11 to discontinue benefits, ~~the reason therefor, and~~ including an explanation of the
12 reason for discontinuing benefits, an explanation of the employee's right to
13 respond, and the procedure for filing the required report or challenging the
14 proposed action. A copy of the notice must be mailed to the ~~claimant's~~ employee's
15 doctor. Thereafter, if the required certification is not filed, the bureau shall
16 discontinue ~~temporary total~~ disability benefits ~~by formal order,~~ effective ~~no sooner~~
17 ~~than~~ twenty-one days after the date of the notice of intention to discontinue
18 benefits is mailed or the date on which the employee actually returned to work,
19 whichever occurs first.
- 20 6. ~~Upon receipt of a report or other evidence indicating a claimant who is receiving~~
21 ~~temporary total disability benefits has been or will be released to return to work, the~~
22 ~~bureau shall issue and mail to the claimant a notice of intention to discontinue~~
23 ~~benefits. Such benefits may thereafter be discontinued on the date of release to~~
24 ~~return to work or twenty one days following mailing of the notice, whichever is later.~~
25 ~~The notice must include a statement of the reason for the action, a brief summary~~
26 ~~of the evidence relied upon by the bureau, and an explanation of the right to~~
27 ~~respond and the procedure for challenging the action and submitting additional~~
28 ~~evidence to the bureau.~~

29 **SECTION 3. AMENDMENT.** Section 65-05-09 of the North Dakota Century Code is
30 amended and reenacted as follows:

1 **65-05-09. Temporary total or permanent total disability - Weekly and aggregate**
2 **~~compensation benefit.~~** If an injury causes temporary total or permanent total disability, the
3 fund shall pay to the disabled employee during ~~such~~ that disability a weekly ~~compensation~~
4 benefit equal to sixty-six and two-thirds percent of the gross weekly wage of the ~~claimant~~
5 employee, subject to a minimum of sixty percent and a maximum of one hundred percent of the
6 average weekly wage in the state. If an employee is disabled due to an injury, that employee's
7 benefits will be based upon the employee's wage and the bureau benefit rates in effect on the
8 date of first disability.

- 9 1. If an employee suffers disability but is able to return to employment for a period of
10 twelve consecutive calendar months or more, that employee's benefits will be
11 based upon the wage in effect at the time of the recurrence of the disability or upon
12 the wage that employee received prior to the injury, whichever is higher; ~~and the~~.
13 The bureau benefit rates shall be are those in effect at the time of that recurrence.
- 14 2. ~~In case of permanent total or temporary total disability, there must be paid to such~~
15 ~~disabled employee an additional dependency allowance for each child of the~~
16 ~~employee at the rate of ten dollars per week per child. Effective July 1, 1989, this~~
17 ~~rate must be paid to each eligible employee regardless of the date of injury.~~
- 18 3. ~~Dependency allowance for the children may be made directly to either parent or~~
19 ~~guardian at the discretion of the bureau.~~
- 20 4. ~~In no case may the compensation~~ The disability benefit or the combined
21 ~~compensation~~ disability benefit and dependency award may not exceed the weekly
22 wage of the employee after deductions for social security and federal income tax.
- 23 5- 3. When an employee ~~who~~ is permanently and totally disabled ~~and~~, must be
24 maintained in a nursing home or similar facility, and has no dependent parent,
25 spouse, or children, ~~part or all~~ as much of that employee's weekly ~~compensation~~
26 benefit as is necessary may be used by the bureau to help defray the cost of ~~such~~
27 the nursing home care.

28 **SECTION 4.** A new section to chapter 65-05 of the North Dakota Century Code is
29 created and enacted as follows:

30 **Preacceptance disability benefits.** If, after receiving a claim for benefits, the bureau
31 determines that more information is needed to process the claim, but that the information in the

file indicates the injured employee is more likely than not entitled to disability benefits, the bureau may pay preacceptance disability benefits equal to the minimum weekly disability benefit allowed under section 65-05-09. The bureau may continue to pay preacceptance disability benefits to the employee during the period the claim is pending, unless the injured employee is not cooperating with requests from the bureau for additional information needed to process the claim. The bureau may not pay more than sixty days of preacceptance benefits. The bureau may only recover a payment made to an injured employee under this section if that recovery is allowed under section 65-05-33. There is no appeal from a bureau decision not to pay preacceptance disability benefits.

SECTION 5. AMENDMENT. Section 65-05-10 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

65-05-10. Partial disability - Weekly ~~compensation~~ benefit. If the injury causes temporary partial disability resulting in decrease of earning capacity, the ~~compensation~~ disability benefit is sixty-six and two-thirds percent of the difference between the injured employee's average weekly wages before the injury and the employee's wage earning capacity after the injury in the same or another employment. However, the partial disability benefits plus dependency allowance and earning capacity may not exceed the weekly wage of the employee after deductions for social security and federal and state income tax ~~benefit rates as defined in section 65-05-09.~~

- ~~1. It is the burden of the employee to show that the inability to obtain employment or to earn as much as the employee earned at the time of injury, is due to physical limitation related to the injury, and that any wage loss claimed is the result of the compensable injury.~~
- ~~2. If the employee voluntarily limits income or refuses to accept employment suitable to the employee's capacity, offered to or procured for the employee, such employee is not entitled to any compensation at any time during the continuance of such refusal unless, at any time, such refusal is justified in the opinion of the bureau.~~
- ~~3. No compensation is payable unless the loss of earning capacity exceeds ten percent. The claimant may earn up to ten percent of the claimant's average gross weekly earnings with no reduction in total disability benefits.~~

4. ~~Upon securing suitable employment, the injured employee shall notify the bureau of the name and address of the employer, the date the employment began, and the amount of wages being received on an annual basis. The injured employee shall notify the bureau whenever there is a change in wages received.~~

5. The benefits provided by this section are available to any otherwise eligible worker, providing the loss of earning capacity occurs after July 1, 1989. Partial loss of earning capacity occurring prior to July 1, 1989, must be paid at a rate to be fixed by the bureau.

6. ~~Dependency allowance must be paid under section 65-05-09 on claims receiving benefits under this section.~~

7. 2. Benefits must be paid during the continuance of partial disability, not to exceed a period of five years. The bureau may waive the five-year limit on the duration of partial disability benefits in cases of catastrophic injury as defined in section 65-05.1-06.1 or when the injured worker is working and has long-term restrictions verified by clear and convincing objective medical and vocational evidence that limits the injured worker to working less than twenty-eight hours per week because of the compensable work injury. This subsection is effective for partial loss of earnings capacity occurring after June 30, 1991.

8. 3. The employee's earnings capacity may be established by expert vocational evidence of a capacity to earn in the statewide job pool where the worker lives. Actual postinjury earnings are presumptive evidence of earnings capacity where the job employs the employee to full work capacity in terms of hours worked per week, and where the job is in a field related to the employee's transferable skills. The presumption may be rebutted by competent evidence from a vocational expert that the employee's actual earnings do not fairly reflect the employee's earnings capacity in the statewide job pool, considering the employee's capabilities, education, experience, and skills.

SECTION 6. AMENDMENT. Section 65-06.2-02 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

65-06.2-02. Coverage of inmates - Conditions.

- 1 1. If an inmate in performance of work in connection with the maintenance of the
2 institution, or with any industry maintained ~~therein~~ within the institution, or with any
3 public service activity, sustains a compensable injury, the inmate may, ~~upon being~~
4 ~~released from the institution, or after discharge from public service~~, be awarded
5 and paid ~~compensation~~ benefits under the ~~provision~~ provisions of this title, upon
6 being released from the institution or after discharge from public service.
- 7 2. Claims under this chapter ~~shall~~ must be filed and processed pursuant to section
8 65-05-01, except that an inmate ~~shall~~ also ~~have~~ has one year from the date of first
9 release from the institution or discharge from public service to file a claim.
- 10 3. Workers' compensation benefits under this chapter accrue and are payable from
11 the time of the inmate's release from the institution or after discharge from public
12 service. Disability benefits must be computed according to the methods provided
13 in chapter 65-05. The inmate's weekly wage must be computed using either the
14 actual wage paid to the inmate or the federal minimum wage as of the date of
15 injury, whichever is higher.
- 16 4. If a former inmate receiving disability benefits under the provisions of this chapter
17 is recommitted or sentenced by a court to imprisonment in a penal institution, the
18 disability benefits are payable pursuant to subsection ~~3~~ 2 of section 65-05-08.

19 **SECTION 7. EFFECTIVE DATE.** Subsection 2 of section 1 of this Act is effective for all
20 confined employees whose period of confinement begins after July 31, 1997, regardless of the
21 date of injury. Subsection 2 of section 5 of this Act is effective for all determinations made after
22 July 31, 1997, regardless of the date of injury. The remainder of section 1, sections 2 and 3,
23 the remainder of section 5, and section 6 are effective for all claims, regardless of the date of
24 injury. Section 4 of this Act is effective for all claims filed after July 31, 1997.

25 **SECTION 8. EXPIRATION DATE.** Section 4 of this Act is effective through July 31,
26 1999, and after that date is ineffective.