

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON
SENATE DISTRICT G

Sponsor Statement for SB 206

Each year, countless workers face the challenges of injuries, illnesses, or changes in their disability status, often leading to significant time away from work. This not only affects their livelihoods but also impacts the workforce and economy at large. Senate Bill 206 seeks to restore Alaska's once strong and healthy workforce. Through the creation of this program, an injured worker may elect assistance to return-to-work with their employer at the time of injury. The Program is optional and can be declined by a worker or an employer.

These programs focus on strategies that retain or reengage workers experiencing such changes, aiming to swiftly reintegrate them into the workforce. By providing necessary support and resources, SAW/RTW programs ensure that workers can continue their careers despite new health challenges, thereby maintaining a robust and resilient workforce.

The goal of the program is to return the worker to the same position with the same employer or to a modified position with the same employer after an injury or an occupational disease occurs. Furthermore, services provided as part of the assistance program are provided in lieu of reemployment services. Changes under this bill would be optimized by the ability of the insurer, rehabilitation specialist, and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to provide one another necessary information. The services offered as part of the Program are available as a service apart from a determination regarding indemnity benefits.

Across the United States, states like Oregon and Montana, have made significant strides in implementing SAW/RTW initiatives. These programs have demonstrated success in reducing the time employees spend away from work due to disabilities or injuries, offering financial incentives, and facilitating necessary workplace adjustments. The adoption of similar legislation in Alaska promises substantial benefits. It can enhance our state's workforce stability, reduce the economic impact of prolonged employee absence, and promote a more inclusive and supportive work environment. By passing this legislation, Alaska can join other states in leading the way towards a more adaptable and supportive workforce, ultimately benefiting both our economy and the well-being of Alaskan workers.