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Bill eases jobless aid in domestic-violence cases

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A Senate committee on Monday endorsed a bill that would make it easier for victims of domestic violence to qualify for unemployment benefits.

House Bill 1105 would let victims show proof of counseling or a police report to prove they left their job because of domestic violence. Current law requires victims to show both evidence of counseling and a police report.

"I think this is a very good policy goal and has a relatively modest impact," said the bill's sponsor, Sen. Jennifer Veiga, D-Denver.

Twanna LaTrice Hill, public policy director of the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence, said domestic violence often interferes with a victim's ability to work.

One quarter of battered women say they have had to quit a job partly because of domestic violence, Hill said.

The bill would affect only a small number of unemployment claims, said Mike Cullen, director of unemployment insurance for the state.

Cullen said only 98 claims cited domestic violence as the cause of job loss - out of 160,000 claims processed by the state last year. Only 47 of those domestic-violence claims were granted.

Still, Sen. Andy McElhany, R-Colorado Springs, said he was concerned that some people could abuse the less lenient rules to qualify for unemployment.

"A lot of times we will enact a good idea and people immediately start trying to figure out how to take advantage of it," McElhany said.

McElhany was the only senator to vote against the bill, which passed the Senate Business, Labor and Technology Committee 5-1. The bill now heads to the full Senate.

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