ENGROSSED SENATE
BILL NO. 548

By: Laster of the Senate

and

Morgan (Fred) of the House

An Act relating to workers' compensation; amending 85 O.S. 2001, Sections 3.6 and 93, which relate to appellate procedures and collection and deposit of fees; modifying certain fees; creating new fee; providing for deposit fees; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 85 O.S. 2001, Section 3.6, is amended to read as follows:

Section 3.6 A. All the evidence pertaining to each case, except upon agreed orders, shall, insofar as may be possible, be heard by the judge initially assigned to the case. Upon the completion of such hearing or hearings, the judge hearing the cause shall make such order, decision or award as is proper, just and equitable in the matter. Either party feeling himself aggrieved by such order, decision or award shall, within ten (10) days, have the right to take an appeal from the order, decision or award of the Judge to the Workers' Compensation Court sitting en banc. Such appeal shall be allowed as a matter of right to either party upon filing with the Administrator a notice of such appeal. Such Court en banc shall consist of three (3) Judges of the Court, none of whom shall have presided over any of the previous hearings on the claim. The Court en banc may reverse or modify the decision only if it determines that such decision was against the clear weight of the evidence or contrary to law. Upon completion of the appeal, the members of the Court sitting en banc shall issue such order, decision or award as is proper, just and equitable. Only those

members participating in the hearing on appeal shall participate in the making of the order, decision or award. All orders, decisions or awards shall be approved by a majority of the members of the Court sitting en banc. Provided, there may be more than one Court en banc sitting at the same time for purposes of hearing the appeals provided for herein. Appeals shall be allowed on a question of law or a question of fact, or a mixed question of law and fact, and shall be determined on the record made before the Judge. Provided, when the order of the Judge of the Court making an award to a claimant is appealed by the employer or the insurance carrier, interest shall be allowed on the accrued amounts of the award due from the date the award was filed, if the award is not modified or vacated on appeal.

B. In each case filed in the Court en banc, and at the time of filing same, the appellant shall deposit with the clerk as costs ~~One Hundred Twenty-five Dollars ($125.00)~~ Two Hundred Dollars ($200.00) of which no rebate of any part thereof shall be made. The fee collected under this subsection shall be deposited as follows: ~~One Hundred Dollars ($100.00)~~ One Hundred Seventy-five Dollars ($175.00) to the credit of the Administrator of Workers' Compensation Revolving Fund created by Section 95 of this title for the costs of administering the Workers' Compensation Act; and Twenty-five Dollars ($25.00) to the credit of the Administrator of Workers' Compensation Revolving Fund for purposes of implementing the provisions of this act, including strengthening and providing additional funding for the Attorney General's Workers' Compensation Fraud Unit, providing counseling services pursuant to the workers' compensation counselor program and safety in the workplace.

C. The order, decision or award of the Court shall be final and conclusive upon all questions within its jurisdiction between the parties, unless, within twenty (20) days after a copy of such order, decision or award has been sent by the Administrator to the parties

affected, an action is commenced in the Supreme Court of the state, to review such order, decision or award. Any order, decision or award made by a judge of the Court shall be considered as final under the provisions of this section unless appealed to the Workers' Compensation Court sitting en banc as provided for in subsection A of this section. The order, decision or award of a judge of the Court shall be final and conclusive upon all questions within his jurisdiction between the parties unless appealed directly to the Supreme Court or to the Workers' Compensation Court sitting en banc as hereinbefore provided. Any party litigant desiring to appeal directly from such order, decision or award to the Supreme Court, shall, within twenty (20) days after a copy of the order, decision or award has been sent by the Administrator to the parties affected, commence an action in the Supreme Court of the state to review such order, decision or award. The Supreme Court shall have original jurisdiction of such action, and shall prescribe rules for the commencement and trial of the same. Such action shall be commenced by filing with the Clerk of the Supreme Court a certified copy of the order, decision or award of the Workers' Compensation Court sitting en banc or the judge attached to the petition by the complaint wherein the complainant or petitioner shall make his assignments or specifications as to wherein said order, decision or award is erroneous or illegal. Provided, however, no proceeding to reverse, vacate or modify any order, decision or award of the Workers' Compensation Court sitting en banc or judge of the Court wherein compensation has been awarded an injured employee shall be entertained by the Supreme Court unless the Administrator shall take a written undertaking to the claimant executed on the part of the respondent or insurance carrier, or both, with one or more sureties to be approved by the Administrator, to the effect that the appellant will pay the amount of the award rendered therein, together with interest thereon from the date of the award by the

judge of the Court and all costs of the proceeding, or on the further order of the Workers' Compensation Court sitting en banc or judge of the Court after the appeal has been decided by the Supreme Court, except that municipalities and other political subdivisions of the State of Oklahoma are exempt from making such written undertakings. Before the Clerk of the Supreme Court shall accept the action for filing, a certificate from the Administrator shall be required, showing that this provision has been complied with. Said proceedings shall be heard in a summary manner and shall have precedence over all other civil cases in the Supreme Court, except preferred Corporation Commission appeals. The Supreme Court shall require the appealing party to file within forty-five (45) days from the date of the filing of an appeal or an order appealed from, a transcript of the record of the proceedings before the Workers' Compensation Court, or upon application and for good cause shown, the Supreme Court may extend the time for filing said transcript of the record for a period of time not to exceed ninety (90) days from said date, and such action shall be subject to the law and practice applicable to other civil actions cognizable in said Supreme Court. The Court whose action was appealed shall enter any order directed by the Supreme Court under the final determination. A fee of One Hundred Dollars ($100.00) for preparing, assembling, indexing and transmitting the record for appellate review shall be collected by the Administrator and taxed as costs to be paid by the party taking the appeal. If more than one party to the action shall prosecute an appeal to the Supreme Court from the same order, decision or award, the fee shall be paid by the party whose petition in error is determined by the Workers' Compensation Court or by the appellate court to commence the principal appeal. The fees collected under this subsection shall be deposited to the credit of the Administrator of Workers' Compensation Revolving Fund.

D. When the only controverted issue in a death claim is the determination of proper beneficiaries entitled to receive death benefits, and the parties-beneficiary appeal the decision of the Court, the employer or insurance carrier may pay the proceeds, as they accrue, to the Administrator. The Administrator shall hold the proceeds in trust in an interest-bearing account during the appeal period and shall distribute the proceeds and interest to the proper beneficiaries upon written direction of the Court. The employer or insurance carrier shall not be taxed interest or cost on the order of the death claim if payments have been made to the Administrator as they accrue.

E. An action to reopen any case under the provisions of the Workers' Compensation Act shall be assigned in the same manner as original assignments made hereunder.

F. Benefits for an injury shall be determined by the law in effect at the time of injury; benefits for death shall be determined by the law in effect at the time of death.

G. For purposes of this section, interest shall be computed pursuant to Section 727 of Title 12 of the Oklahoma Statutes.

SECTION 2. AMENDATORY 85 O.S. 2001, Section 93, is amended to read as follows:

Section 93. A. The following fee shall be collected by the Administrator and taxed as costs to be paid by the party against whom any award becomes final:

A fee of ~~Seventy-five Dollars ($75.00)~~ <u>One Hundred Dollars ($100.00)</u> per case to be deposited as follows:

1. ~~Forty Dollars ($40.00)~~ <u>Sixty-five Dollars ($65.00)</u> to the credit of the Administrator of Workers' Compensation Revolving Fund created by Section 95 of this title;

2. Ten Dollars ($10.00) to the credit of the Office of the Attorney General's Workers' Compensation Fraud Unit Revolving Fund created by Section 19.2 of Title 74 of the Oklahoma Statutes; and

3. Twenty-five Dollars ($25.00) to the credit of the Administrator of Workers' Compensation Revolving Fund, created by Section 95 of this title, for purposes of implementing the provisions of this act, including strengthening and providing additional funding for the Attorney General's Workers' Compensation Fraud Unit, providing counseling services pursuant to the workers' compensation counselor program and safety in the workplace.

B. A fee of ~~Seventy-five Dollars ($75.00)~~ One Hundred Dollars ($100.00) per action to reopen any case pursuant to Section 28 of this title shall be collected by the Administrator and taxed as costs to be paid by the party that reopens the case. The fee collected pursuant to this subsection shall be deposited to the credit of the Administrator of Workers' Compensation Revolving Fund, created by Section 95 of this title, for purposes of implementing the provisions of this act, including strengthening and providing additional funding for the Attorney General's Workers' Compensation Fraud Unit, providing counseling services pursuant to the workers' compensation counselor program and safety in the workplace.

SECTION 3. This act shall become effective November 1, 2005.

Passed the Senate the 2nd day of March, 2005.

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Presiding Officer of the Senate

Passed the House of Representatives the ____ day of _____, 2005.

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Presiding Officer of the House of Representatives