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## Early Learning & Human Services Committee

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### HB 2007

**Brief Description:** Concerning participation in the WorkFirst program.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Pettigrew, Kagi and Ormsby.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides that a recipient of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF) who is a parent of a child younger than 2 years old may claim a good cause exemption from participation in WorkFirst activities.
- Provides that a parent of a child younger than 2 years old who claims a good cause exemption must voluntarily accept home visitation services in order to be eligible for subsidized child care under the Working Connections Child Care program.
- Excludes, from the five year limit, time during which a TANF recipient has received a good cause exemption from participation in WorkFirst activities; a recipient is eligible for a good cause exemption for up to two years.

**Hearing Date:** 3/15/11

**Staff:** Linda Merelle (786-7092).

#### **Background:**

##### Creation of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program.

Before 1997 Washington operated a welfare program for low-income families with children called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). If a family had children under the age of 18 years and met income and resource standards, the family was eligible for assistance under the program. The family had a legal entitlement to monthly cash payments and medical coverage through the Medicaid. This assistance continued as long as the family met the eligibility criteria.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

In 1996 the U.S. Congress enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This act replaced the AFDC program with a new program called the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF). Under this federally funded program for public assistance, the states were required to implement reforms as set forth by Congress. Instead of an uncapped federal funding formula based upon the state's caseload, a capped federal block grant was provided to the states.

### WorkFirst.

In 1997 the Legislature passed Engrossed House Bill 3901 which implemented the reforms required by Congress. To receive the block grant authorized under the federal legislation, the states were required to establish a program to move TANF recipients into permanent jobs. Under the federal TANF legislation, the receipt of continued assistance was conditioned upon the individual's participation in work activities. In response to this requirement under the federal law, the Legislature created the Washington WorkFirst program (WorkFirst). An adult may receive TANF benefits for a maximum of 5 years.

The Employment Security Department (ESD), the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), and the Department of Commerce provide WorkFirst services. The ESD provides a comprehensive skill assessment, employment preparation, job search, and on-the-job training. The SBCTC provides training and basic education skills at community and technical colleges throughout Washington. The Department of Commerce administers the Community Jobs Program designed to assist WorkFirst participants that are the most difficult to employ.

A TANF recipient may, for good cause, be exempt from participating in WorkFirst if the recipient is a parent with a child who is less than one year old. A parent who is exempt under this provision may be required to participate in mental health treatment, alcohol or drug treatment, domestic violence services, or parenting education or skills training for up to 20 hours per week. A parent is eligible for this good cause exemption for a maximum period of one year.

The Department of Social and Health Services must work with parents with children younger than one year old who claim a good cause exemption to provide services to improve parenting skills and promote child well-being. Such services include home visitation which is an early childhood intervention. Participation in home visitation services is voluntary.

### Working Connections Child Care.

The Working Connections Child Care program provides subsidized child care for families whose income does not exceed 175 percent of the federal poverty level.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The time period during which a TANF recipient is not engaged in WorkFirst activities for good cause does not count toward the 60-month limit for the receipt of TANF benefits. A TANF recipient who is a parent may claim a good cause exemption if he or she has a child younger than 2 years old. A parent recipient who claims a good cause exemption but declines to participate in a home visitation program is not eligible for Working Connections Child Care.

The good cause exemption for a parent with a child under the age of 2 years is available for a maximum period of 2 years.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on March 3, 2011.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on May 1, 2011.