

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1342

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Human Services

Title: An act relating to the definition of work activity for the purposes of the WorkFirst program.

Brief Description: Concerning the definition of work activity for the purposes of the WorkFirst program.

Sponsors: Representatives Walsh, Kagi, Johnson, Goodman, Sawyer, Orwall, Farrell, Roberts, Freeman, Appleton, Jinkins, Maxwell, Santos and Moscoso.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/7/13, 2/12/13, 2/15/13 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends the period of time that a WorkFirst participant may receive vocational training from 12 months to 24 months.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Freeman, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Farrell, Goodman, MacEwen, Roberts, Sawyer and Zeiger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Overstreet.

Staff: Linda Merelle (786-7092).

Background:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a federal block grant established under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The TANF

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program replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, which had provided grants to poor families with children since the 1930s.

States use TANF block grants to operate their own programs. State programs differ, but operate in accordance with the following purposes set forth in federal law:

- to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

In addition to money received from the federal government, states are required to spend their own funds on programs for needy families or face financial penalties; this is referred to as the Maintenance of Effort, or MOE, requirement.

WorkFirst.

Washington's TANF program is called WorkFirst, and is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services. Under WorkFirst, eligible adults receive various forms of assistance while they participate in activities that will help them connect to the workforce. The federal statutes require a certain "participation" rate for adults receiving TANF benefits, and states may be penalized if they fail to meet the required participation rate.

Federal statute defines both the activity as well as the length of time that a WorkFirst participant may spend on that activity. These definitions are also codified in state law. A work activity includes unsubsidized and subsidized paid employment, internships, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness assistance, vocational educational training, education, and other activities.

Under current law, a WorkFirst participant's vocational educational training may not exceed 12 months.

Summary of Bill:

Under state statute, a WorkFirst participant may receive up to 24 months of vocational training. The federal statutory limitation of 12 months remains unchanged.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Workers with higher levels of education earn substantially more and experience lowers rates of unemployment during economic downturns. By 2019 two-thirds of job openings will require at least one year of college and thousands in the mid-level of education are offered specifically by the state's community and technical colleges. Many students struggle to finish a one-year program within 12 months because many programs require one or two quarters of prerequisites. The parents often have to work and go to school at the same time. If part-time students could participate full time, it would result in increased retention, completion, and successful transition into employment. Currently, nearly one-third of parents receiving TANF do not have a high school diploma. Fewer than 20 percent have training beyond high school. Increasing the ability to pursue vocational education to 24 months would improve the effectiveness of the TANF as an anti-poverty tool. Under this bill, parents receiving TANF benefits would be able to access opportunities that lead to family-wage jobs. One more year could have made the difference between a strong foundation in life and a life-time struggle to obtaining basic needs. Twelve months is not a long enough time to complete some programs. Without the additional time, some degrees are inaccessible.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Rick Krauss, Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; Kate Barber and Marcy Bowers, Statewide Poverty Action Network; Brooke-Lynn Noonan; and Patricia Ridge.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.