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**SENATE BILL 6478**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2020 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Nguyen, Darneille, Stanford, Saldaña, Dhingra, Das, and Hasegawa

AN ACT Relating to revising economic assistance programs by updating standards of need, revising outcome measures and data collected, and reducing barriers to participation; amending RCW 74.04.770 and 74.08A.010; reenacting and amending RCW 74.08A.260; adding a new section to chapter 74.08A RCW; creating new sections; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 74.04.770 and 2011 1st sp.s. c 36 s 26 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) The department shall establish consolidated standards of need each fiscal year which may vary by geographical areas, program, and family size, for temporary assistance for needy families, refugee assistance, ((~~supplemental security income, and benefits under RCW 74.62.030~~)) the pregnant women assistance program, and state family assistance.

(b)(i) Standards for temporary assistance for needy families, refugee assistance, ((~~and benefits under RCW 74.62.030~~)) the pregnant women assistance program, and state family assistance shall be based on studies of actual living costs and generally recognized inflation indices and shall include reasonable allowances for household budget items including shelter, fuel, food, transportation, clothing, household maintenance and operations, personal maintenance, ((~~and~~)) necessary incidentals, and out-of-pocket costs a recipient may incur for child care and health care.

(ii) By September 1, 2020, the department must submit to the office of financial management, the legislative-executive WorkFirst poverty reduction oversight task force, and the legislature, a revised comprehensive study of living costs. The comprehensive study must include recommendations for temporary assistance for needy families grant standards as a percentage of need. Living costs must be updated annually according to recognized inflation indices. By September 1, 2022, and every four years thereafter, the department must adjust the estimated base costs to a consumer for household budget items used in the study, in addition to annual adjustments for inflation.

(iii) By September 1, 2029, and every ten years thereafter, the department must submit a redesigned and updated comprehensive study to the office of financial management, the legislative-executive WorkFirst poverty reduction oversight task force, and the legislature. When completing each ten-year redesign, the department must adjust study parameters, including cost categories and geographic boundaries, as necessary.

(c) The standard of need may take into account the economies of joint living arrangements, but unless explicitly required by federal statute, there shall not be proration of any portion of assistance grants unless the amount of the grant standard is equal to the standard of need.

(2)(a) The department is authorized to establish rateable reductions and grant maximums consistent with federal law.

(b) Payment level will be equal to need or a lesser amount if rateable reductions or grant maximums are imposed. In no case shall a recipient of supplemental security income receive a state supplement less than the minimum required by federal law.

(3) The department may establish a separate standard for shelter provided at no cost.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.08A.010 and 2019 c 343 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A family that includes an adult who has received temporary assistance for needy families for sixty months after July 27, 1997, shall be ineligible for further temporary assistance for needy families assistance.

(2) For the purposes of applying the rules of this section, the department shall count any month in which an adult family member received a temporary assistance for needy families cash assistance grant unless the assistance was provided when the adult family member was a minor child and not the head of the household or married to the head of the household.

(3) The department shall adopt regulations to apply the sixty-month time limit to households in which a parent is in the home and ineligible for temporary assistance for needy families. Any regulations shall be consistent with federal funding requirements.

(4) The department shall refer recipients who require specialized assistance to appropriate department programs, crime victims' programs through the department of commerce, or the crime victims' compensation program of the department of labor and industries.

(5)(a) The department shall add to adopted rules related to temporary assistance for needy families time limit extensions, the following criteria by which the department shall exempt a recipient and the recipient's family from the application of subsection (1) of this section:

(i) ((~~By reason of hardship, including if~~)) If the recipient is a homeless person as described in RCW 43.185C.010; ((~~or~~))

(ii) By reason of hardship, including if the recipient:

(A) Is participating satisfactorily in the program;

(B) Is temporarily prevented from working or looking for employment;

(C) Is in need of mental health or substance use disorder treatment; or

(D) Demonstrates another basis by which the time limit pursuant to subsection (1) of this section would cause undue hardship to the recipient or the recipient's family; or

(iii) If the family includes an individual who meets the family violence options of section 402(A)(7) of Title IVA of the federal social security act as amended by P.L. 104-193.

(b) Policies related to circumstances under which a recipient will be exempted from the application of subsection (1) or (3) of this section shall treat adults receiving benefits on their own behalf, and parents receiving benefits on behalf of their child similarly, unless required otherwise under federal law.

(6) The department shall not exempt a recipient and his or her family from the application of subsection (1) or (3) of this section until after the recipient has received fifty-two months of assistance under this chapter.

(7) The department shall provide transitional food assistance for a period of five months to a household that ceases to receive temporary assistance for needy families assistance and is not in sanction status. If necessary, the department shall extend the household's basic food certification until the end of the transition period.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.08A.260 and 2018 c 126 s 5 and 2018 c 58 s 8 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

(1) Each recipient shall be assessed after determination of program eligibility and before referral to job search. Assessments shall be based upon factors that are critical to obtaining employment, including but not limited to education, availability of child care, history of family violence, history of substance abuse, and other factors that affect the ability to obtain employment. Assessments may be performed by the department or by a contracted entity. The assessment shall be based on a uniform, consistent, transferable format that will be accepted by all agencies and organizations serving the recipient.

(2) Based on the assessment, an individual responsibility plan shall be prepared that: (a) Sets forth an employment goal and a plan for maximizing the recipient's success at meeting the employment goal; (b) considers WorkFirst educational and training programs from which the recipient could benefit; (c) contains the obligation of the recipient to participate in the program by complying with the plan; (d) moves the recipient into full-time WorkFirst activities as quickly as possible; and (e) describes the services available to the recipient either during or after WorkFirst to enable the recipient to obtain and keep employment and to advance in the workplace and increase the recipient's wage earning potential over time.

(3) Recipients who are not engaged in work and work activities, and do not qualify for a good cause exemption under RCW 74.08A.270, shall engage in self-directed service as provided in RCW 74.08A.330.

(4)(a) If a recipient refuses to engage in work and work activities required by the department, the department must review the recipient's case to ensure the department has taken into consideration any barriers to work activities and made any necessary revisions to the recipient's individual responsibility plan. As part of the review, the department must consider: (i) Whether the recipient was provided with adequate notice and opportunity to remedy his or her noncompliance with program requirements; and (ii) if the department considered good cause reasons for failure to participate pursuant to RCW 74.08A.270 before imposing sanctions.

(b) After four months of continuous noncompliance, the family's grant ((~~shall~~)) may be reduced by the recipient's share((~~, and may, if the department determines it appropriate, be terminated~~)) or by forty percent, whichever is greater.

(5) The department may waive the penalties required under subsection (4) of this section, subject to a finding that the recipient refused to engage in work for good cause provided in RCW 74.08A.270.

(6) In consultation with the recipient, the department or contractor shall place the recipient into a work activity that is available in the local area where the recipient resides.

(7) Assessments conducted under this section shall include a consideration of the potential benefit to the recipient of engaging in financial literacy activities. The department shall consider the options for financial literacy activities available in the community, including information and resources available through the financial education public-private partnership created under RCW 28A.300.450. The department may authorize up to ten hours of financial literacy activities as a core activity or an optional activity under WorkFirst.

(8) Subsections (2) through (6) of this section are suspended for a recipient who is a parent or other relative personally providing care for a child under the age of two years. This suspension applies to both one and two parent families. However, both parents in a two-parent family cannot use the suspension during the same month. Nothing in this subsection shall prevent a recipient from participating in the WorkFirst program on a voluntary basis.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 74.08A RCW to read as follows:

The department may not require applicants for temporary assistance for needy families to attend a WorkFirst orientation as a condition of eligibility. The department may incorporate orientation information into the recipient assessment conducted pursuant to RCW 74.08A.260.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Except for section 1 of this act, this act takes effect May 1, 2021.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act applies prospectively only and not retroactively.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  If specific funding for the purposes of this act, referencing this act by bill or chapter number, is not provided by June 30, 2020, in the supplemental omnibus appropriations act, this act is null and void.

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