

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2634

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to disqualifying fugitives from receiving general assistance.

Brief Description: Denying public assistance to fugitives from justice.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Child & Family Service (originally sponsored by Representatives H. Sommers, Cooke, Dickerson, McDonald, Gombosky, Bush, Tokuda, Wolfe, O'Brien, Kessler, Keiser, Anderson, Ogden, B. Thomas and Thompson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/27/98, 2/3/98 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/10/98, 96-0.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Cooke, Chairman; Boldt, Vice Chairman; Bush, Vice Chairman; Tokuda, Ranking Minority Member; Kastama, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Ballasiotes; Carrell; Dickerson; Gombosky; McDonald and Wolfe.

Staff: Douglas Ruth (786-7134).

Background: During 1996, Congress created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant which replaced the Aid For Dependent Families (AFDC) program. As part of the restrictions placed on block grant funds, Congress prohibited the use of TANF funds for persons fleeing prosecution or who were violating their parole. In Washington, there is no similar restriction on the use of state General Assistance funds.

Summary of Bill: Eligibility for general assistance is denied to persons fleeing a felony prosecution or who are violating a condition of parole, community supervision, or probation imposed for a felony or gross misdemeanor offense.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Federal public assistance programs already deny eligibility to persons fleeing prosecution or who are violating conditions of parole or probation. In the food stamp program, the federal government has been able to deny eligibility to a number of public assistance recipients on the basis of outstanding arrest warrants. Although read strictly, the bill might deny eligibility to a person who has committed a minor parole violation, in practice the department would consult with the person's parole officer regarding the severity of the violation.

Testimony Against: It is better to allow the department to determine what questions they will ask on their assistance applications. The department already asks applicants for food stamps, which most general assistance recipients receive, if they are fleeing prosecution or are violating parole or probation conditions. A minor parole violation (e.g. not meeting with a person's parole officer) could result in the loss of general assistance. The general assistance program serves the most fragile and needy. It provides assistance for the disabled who cannot work.

Testified: Representative H. Sommers (prime sponsor); John Atherton, Department of Social and Health Services (pro with amendment); and Tony Lee, Washington Welfare Coalition (concerns).