

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2901

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to creating a job search component within the WorkFirst program.

Brief Description: Requiring a WorkFirst job search component.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Children & Family Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Cooke, Tokuda, Ballasiotes, Carrell, O'Brien, McDonald, B. Thomas and Boldt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/27/98, 1/29/98 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/98, 98-0.

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: The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act replaced AFDC with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. To receive a block grant, states must establish a program to move TANF recipients into permanent jobs. The program must make participation in work activities a condition of receiving continued assistance.

In response to this legislation, Washington created the WorkFirst program. The WorkFirst program established by the Department of Social and Health Services includes a work search component. This component requires the TANF recipient to participate in a job search workshop and an assisted job search. Recipients may also receive short-term job training if a job search is initially unsuccessful. If it is clear that a job search will not be productive for a recipient, he or she is referred for additional assessment.

The assessment may identify the need for more specific training, work experience, or help for personal conditions such as drug/alcohol abuse, domestic violence, or a learning disability.

Summary of Bill: A job search component is created in law. The initial job search period is limited to twelve consecutive weeks. During the first four weeks, the TANF recipient's progress is reviewed. If at anytime it becomes clear that the recipient cannot benefit from further searching, the department will conduct an assessment. Based on the assessment, the department may refer the recipient to training, work experience, or another type of service that will make the recipient more employable. At any time, the department may have the recipient perform additional job searching.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Employment Security's current job search program is lengthy. It is important for welfare recipients to have their situation assessed if they do not find a job in a short period of time. Four weeks is an appropriate time to trigger a mandatory assessment.

Testimony Against: The current program has a limit of 12 weeks. This number was arrived at by analyzing the average time it took individuals receiving unemployment benefits to find a job. Since the average time for these individuals was 11-12 weeks, 12 weeks is a reasonable time period to expect welfare recipients to find a job. The current program allows flexibility between regions. In some regions in the state, 12 weeks is a reasonable time to find a job. In others, it should take recipients less time for job searching. Currently in the Tacoma area, recipients are averaging six to eight weeks of job searching. However, in Port Angeles, it has been taking 10-12 weeks for recipients to find work. It is important to recognize that conducting a job search is difficult. It involves a lot of rejection. For some people, it takes a while to get comfortable with this. If an arbitrary end is imposed on the job search component, there is the risk that just as participants are finding success in their search they will have to stop and be assessed. The federal law insures that the job search component will not go on for an unreasonable period of time. Since the law only recognizes a maximum of six weeks of job searching as work activity, the department has an incentive to minimize the period of time participants continue searching before they are assessed. The cost of a job search program also creates an incentive to limit any recipient's search. Employers also become dissatisfied if the department continues to send unemployable participants to interviews.

Testified: Randi Abrams, Jewish Federation (supports with concerns); Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society (supports with concerns); and Stan Marshburn (supports with

concerns).