

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

2SSB 6241

Title: An act relating to establishing performance measures and the setting of goals for earnings gains, job retention, and access to benefits that support work for the WorkFirst program.

Brief Description: Establishing WorkFirst performance measures.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley, Kohl-Welles, Brown, Shin, Kline, Fraser, Prentice, McAuliffe, Patterson, Eide, Rasmussen and Costa.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Meeting Date: February 17, 2000.

Bill Analysis Prepared by: Deborah Frazier (786-7152).

Background: The 1997 act creating the WorkFirst program (Engrossed House Bill 3901) requires earnings and job retention outcome measures. The Governor's WorkFirst performance report currently includes the following performance measures: 50 percent of WorkFirst clients will increase their earnings by 10 percent within one year of leaving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); and 60 percent of WorkFirst clients will earn at least \$2,500 per quarter for four consecutive quarters after leaving TANF for work.

Summary of Bill: A number of performance measures are established and defined. Calculation methodologies and reporting requirements are specified. The state population survey is expanded.

Earnings and Wages. The following median earnings and wage goals are established: an increase of 5 percent six months after beginning paid unsubsidized employment; an increase of 15 percent after one year; an increase of 20 percent after two years; and an increase of 25 percent after three years. Wages will be adjusted for inflation in future calculations.

Job Retention. The following job retention goals are established: 60 percent working full time one year after beginning paid unsubsidized employment; 65 percent working full time after two years; 70 percent working full time after three years; 70 percent working at least half time after one year; 75 percent working at least half time after two years; and 80 percent working at least half time after three years. Definitions of full time— (including school attendance) and half time— are specified.

The Employment Security Department must publish a quarterly report that details the performance of the WorkFirst program in meeting the program goals of wage progression and job retention. The first report is due September 2, 2000 and must report on WorkFirst participants' employment from July, 1997 through December 31, 1999.

Access to Benefits. Work support benefits are defined as food stamps, health insurance and child care assistance. The following goal for access to benefits is established: 95 percent of people leaving TANF, or participating in the TANF cash diversion program in a given quarter, will either be enrolled in work support benefits, or not need such benefits. If the goal is not met for two consecutive years, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must implement an informed consent process requiring that case files contain documented evidence of ineligible status or written documentation that the client has declined the benefit. The DSHS must report the access to benefits data, for each work support benefit, quarterly.

Customer Service Standards. The DSHS must convene a work group which includes recipients of public assistance to establish customer service measures and goals. Certain measures are suggested, including: hours of operation, streamlining requirements, and wait times. The department must report to the Legislature regarding the establishment of these goals by January 15, 2001, and must make a written report to the Legislature on the attainment of these goals twice per year.

State Population Survey. The Office of Financial Management is to expand the bi-annual state population survey to obtain information about low income families' use of benefits, and must prepare a report every two years comparing the number of families eligible for benefits and the number of families accessing benefits.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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