

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 6478

As Passed House - Amended:

March 11, 2020

Title: An act relating to revising economic assistance programs by updating standards of need, revising outcome measures and data collected, and reducing barriers to participation.

Brief Description: Revising economic assistance programs.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Nguyen, Darneille, Stanford, Saldaña, Dhingra, Das and Hasegawa).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services & Early Learning: 2/25/20, 2/26/20 [DPA];

Appropriations: 2/29/20, 3/2/20 [DPA(HSEL)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House - Amended: 3/11/20, 56-41.

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill (As Amended by House)

- Requires an extension to the 60-month lifetime limit for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits when the family includes a child or youth who is homeless.
- Directs the Department of Social and Health Services to report annual data identifying the race of individuals whose benefits were reduced or terminated due to sanctions or time limits.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Callan, Vice Chair; Frame, Vice Chair; Goodman, Kilduff, Lovick and Ortiz-Self.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Eslick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry and Klippert.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Griffey.

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Human Services & Early Learning. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Robinson, 1st Vice Chair; Bergquist, 2nd Vice Chair; Chopp, Cody, Dolan, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Hudgins, Kilduff, Macri, Pettigrew, Pollet, Ryu, Senn, Springer, Sullivan, Tarleton and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Rude, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Chandler, Corry, Dye, Hoff, Kraft, Mosbrucker, Schmick, Steele, Sutherland and Ybarra.

Staff: Linda Merelle (786-7092).

Background:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a federal block grant that provides temporary cash assistance, subsidized childcare, and work programs for low-income families. With limited exceptions, adult TANF recipients must participate in one or more WorkFirst activities that are identified through an assessment and documented in the recipient's Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP). These activities may include paid and unpaid employment-based training programs, career development, community service, work skills assessment and job search training, and vocational training programs. The TANF program is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Time Limit.

Federal rules limit the length of time an adult can receive TANF benefits to a cumulative total of 60 months. States can extend TANF assistance beyond the 60-month limit for up to 20 percent of the average monthly caseload. For federal fiscal year 2018, 4.9 percent of the state's caseload was exempt from the 60-month limit.

Extensions may only be offered to families on the basis of hardship, as defined by the state, or in instances of family violence. The DSHS has adopted rules identifying who is eligible for a time-limit hardship extension. Examples of hardship under the adopted rules include a person with severe and chronic disabilities and a person acting as a caregiver for a disabled child or adult, among others.

In 2019 homelessness was added as a qualifying hardship for an extension to the 60-month limit. For this purpose, "homeless" is defined as an individual living outside or in a building not meant for human habitation or which they have no legal right to occupy, in an emergency shelter, or in a temporary housing program which may include a transitional and supportive housing program if habitation time limits exist.

Summary of Bill:

Time Limit.

The DSHS must exempt TANF recipients from the 60-month time limit due to hardship, family violence, or if the recipient meets criteria in current adopted rules. The DSHS must allow extensions in circumstances where the recipient's family includes a child or youth who is without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as described in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

The existing definition of "homeless person" for extensions to the 60-month time limit is removed.

Reporting on Benefit Reductions and Terminations.

By December 31 each year, the DSHS must report to the Governor and the Legislature disaggregated data identifying the race of individuals whose TANF benefits were reduced or terminated during the preceding year due to sanction or reaching the 60-month limit. If the disaggregated data shows a disproportionate representation of any racial group that has experienced historic disparities, the DSHS must describe steps it is taking to address and remedy the disproportionality.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 27, 2020.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: This bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed, except for section 1, relating to exemptions from the 60-month time limit, which takes effect July 1, 2021.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Human Services & Early Learning):

(In support) During the recession, the state made cuts to programs such as WorkFirst and TANF, and those cuts have not been restored. These reductions in assistance are related to the issues today with homelessness and housing assistance challenges. The WorkFirst and TANF programs are a crucial lifeline to families living in poverty. The striking amendment is important because the DSHS' own data shows that families are terminated not because they refuse to participate in the program but because of barriers. Four out of five families terminated last year due to the noncompliance sanction were not connected with Working Connections Child Care (WCCC). There are child care deserts in the state where families do not have access to the WCCC benefits. Forty percent of people cut off were homeless in the prior year. The state should not be penalizing children when their families are struggling with homelessness. These sanction policies are exacerbating the mental health crisis in the state. The House of Representatives has already passed House Bill 2441, which would eliminate the full family sanction and make the time limits more fair to families. The striking amendment will deepen the positive impact of this bill. The investments made now for children in this program will pay off in the long run for the state with better outcomes for these children and bring greater equity into the fight against intergenerational poverty. Pediatricians address acute health care problems and work with families to help children grow into healthy adults. Basic needs not being met lead to adverse childhood experiences that can have developmental effects on a child into their adult years. When parents and guardians receive direct financial assistance, research shows they use those resources to

support a child's healthy development. The TANF program plays a critical role in keeping families housed and their utilities connected. Families in crisis cannot meet their IRPs, and the TANF benefits are taken away when a family needs it most, making an already difficult situation more traumatizing.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Every year since 2011, there has been harm done by punitive TANF program policies. This bill is a small step in reducing these punitive policies. Eliminating full family sanctions is critical. The bill falls short, and the sanction language in House Bill 2441 would be better. The TANF cases in sanction do not reflect the reality that those clients who want to receive the benefit are not refusing to comply. These clients are struggling to meet the work requirements and often have significant mental health or other barriers such as not being able to find child care. The belief that clients on the TANF program do not want to participate is incorrect and an oversimplification. Full family sanctions worsen families' conditions and make it more difficult for them to get back on their feet. Ending the full family sanction and extending the time limit will go a long way toward helping families.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is a crucial lifeline for families that are struggling to meet basic needs and respond to crises. The time limits disproportionately impact black and indigenous families. Frequently, family units that exceed the 60-month time limit have members that need mental health treatment. Many sanctioned families did not meet work requirements because they did not have access to a childcare subsidy, and many were homeless. The provisions of this bill give families a limited level of support.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Human Services & Early Learning): (In support) Senator Nguyen, prime sponsor; Julie Watts, Washington State Budget and Policy Center; Jeff DeLuca, Washington State Community Action Partnership; Thomas Long, Washington Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics; and Alex Hur, Statewide Poverty Action Network.

(Other) Emil Floresco, Statewide Poverty Action Network; and Grete Schultz, Solid Ground.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Julie Watts, Washington State Budget and Policy Center; and Alex Hur, Statewide Poverty Action Network.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services & Early Learning): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.