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**SENATE BILL 5413**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Senators C. Wilson, Dhingra, Kuderer, Robinson, Saldaña, and Valdez

AN ACT Relating to housing for essential needs and aged, blind, and disabled assistance programs; and amending RCW 43.185C.220, 74.04.805, and 74.62.030.

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

**Sec.**  RCW 43.185C.220 and 2015 c 128 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department shall distribute funds for the essential needs and housing support program established under this section in a manner consistent with the requirements of this section and the biennial operating budget. The first distribution of funds must be completed by September 1, 2011. Essential needs or housing support is only for persons found eligible for such services under RCW 74.04.805 and is not considered an entitlement. A person deemed eligible for essential needs or housing support under RCW 74.04.805 shall be provided with 12 months of consecutive support from the date the department remits its first rent subsidy on behalf of the recipient.

(2) The department shall distribute funds appropriated for the essential needs and housing support program in the form of grants to designated essential needs support and housing support entities within each county. The department shall not distribute any funds until it approves the expenditure plan submitted by the designated essential needs support and housing support entities. The amount of funds to be distributed pursuant to this section shall be designated in the biennial operating budget. For the sole purpose of meeting the initial distribution of funds date, the department may distribute partial funds upon the department's approval of a preliminary expenditure plan. The department shall not distribute the remaining funds until it has approved a final expenditure plan.

(3)((~~(a) During the 2011-2013 biennium, in awarding housing support that is not funded through the contingency fund in this subsection, the designated housing support entity shall provide housing support to clients who are homeless persons as defined in RCW 43.185C.010. As provided in the biennial operating budget for the 2011-2013 biennium, a contingency fund shall be used solely for those clients who are at substantial risk of losing stable housing or at substantial risk of losing one of the other services defined in RCW 74.62.010(6). For purposes of this chapter, "substantial risk" means the client has provided documentation that he or she will lose his or her housing within the next thirty days or that the services will be discontinued within the next thirty days.~~

~~(b) After July 1, 2013, the designated housing support entity shall give first priority to clients who are homeless persons as defined in RCW 43.185C.010 and second priority to clients who would be at substantial risk of losing stable housing without housing support.~~

~~(4)~~)) For each county, the department shall designate an essential needs support entity and a housing support entity that will begin providing these supports to medical care services program recipients on November 1, 2011. Essential needs and housing support entities are not required to provide assistance to every person referred to the local entity ((~~or who meets the priority standards in subsection (3) of this section~~)).

(a) Each designated entity must be a local government or community‑based organization, and may administer the funding for essential needs support, housing support, or both. Designated entities have the authority to subcontract with qualified entities. Upon request, and the approval of the department, two or more counties may combine resources to more effectively deliver services.

(b) The department's designation process must include a review of proficiency in managing housing or human services programs when designating housing support entities.

(c) Within a county, if the department directly awards separate grants to the designated housing support entity and the designated essential needs support entity, the department shall determine the amount allocated for essential needs support as directed in the biennial operating budget.

((~~(5)~~)) (4)(a) Essential needs and housing support entities must use funds distributed under this section as flexibly as is practicable to provide essential needs items and housing support to recipients of the essential needs and housing support program((~~, subject to the requirements of this section~~)).

(b) Benefits provided under the essential needs and housing support program shall not be provided to recipients in the form of cash assistance.

(c) Essential needs and housing support entities may continue to serve clients who move outside of county service areas to other county service areas within Washington for the remainder of a client's authorization period provided that the entity serving the client notifies the entity that serves the geographic area where the client moves to.

(d) Essential needs and housing support entities may agree to transfer clients who move outside of county service areas to other county service areas within Washington. The department shall provide technical support to both entities to ensure a seamless transition for the client. This support may include financial assistance to the entity serving the geographic area where the client moves to.

(e) The department may move funds between entities or between counties to reflect actual caseload changes. In doing so, the department must: (i) Develop a process for reviewing the caseload of designated essential needs and housing support entities, and for redistributing grant funds from those entities experiencing reduced actual caseloads to those with increased actual caseloads; and (ii) inform all designated entities of the redistribution process. Savings resulting from program caseload attrition from the essential needs and housing support program shall not result in increased per‑client expenditures.

((~~(d)~~)) (f) Essential needs and housing support entities must partner with other public and private organizations to maximize the beneficial impact of funds distributed under this section, and should attempt to leverage other sources of public and private funds to serve essential needs and housing support recipients. Funds appropriated in the operating budget for essential needs and housing support must be used only to serve persons eligible to receive services under that program.

((~~(6)~~)) (5) The department shall use no more than five percent of the funds for administration of the essential needs and housing support program. Each essential needs and housing support entity shall use no more than ((~~seven~~)) 11 percent of the funds for administrative expenses.

((~~(7)~~)) (6) The department shall:

(a) Require housing support entities to enter data into the homeless client management information system;

(b) Require essential needs support entities to report on services provided under this section;

(c) In collaboration with the department of social and health services, submit a report annually to the relevant policy and fiscal committees of the legislature. A preliminary report shall be submitted by December 31, 2011, and must include (c)(i), (iii), and (v) of this subsection. Annual reports must be submitted beginning December 1, 2012, and must include:

(i) A description of the actions the department has taken to achieve the objectives of chapter 36, Laws of 2011 1st sp. sess.;

(ii) The amount of funds used by the department to administer the program;

(iii) Information on the housing status of essential needs and housing support recipients served by housing support entities, and individuals who have requested housing support but did not receive housing support;

(iv) Grantee expenditure data related to administration and services provided under this section; and

(v) Efforts made to partner with other entities and leverage sources or public and private funds;

(d) Review the data submitted by the designated entities, and make recommendations for program improvements and administrative efficiencies. The department has the authority to designate alternative entities as necessary due to performance or other significant issues. Such change must only be made after consultation with the department of social and health services and the impacted entity; and

(e) Ensure that any forms used by individuals applying for or receiving essential needs and housing support, regardless of eligibility, are designed in a manner that the form may be shared with the department of social and health services for the purposes of RCW 43.185C.230.

((~~(8)~~)) (7) The department, counties, and essential needs and housing support entities are not civilly or criminally liable and may not have any penalty or cause of action of any nature arise against them related to decisions regarding: (a) The provision or lack of provision of housing or essential needs support; or (b) the type of housing arrangement supported with funds allocated under this section, when the decision was made in good faith and in the performance of the powers and duties under this section. However, this section does not prohibit legal actions against the department, county, or essential needs or housing support entity to enforce contractual duties or obligations.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.04.805 and 2022 c 208 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department is responsible for determining eligibility for referral for essential needs and housing support under RCW 43.185C.220. Persons eligible are persons who:

(a) Have been determined to be eligible for the pregnant women assistance program under RCW 74.62.030 or are incapacitated from gainful employment by reason of bodily or mental infirmity that will likely continue for a minimum of ((~~ninety~~)) 90 days. The standard for incapacity in this subsection, as evidenced by the ((~~ninety-day~~)) 90-day duration standard, is not intended to be as stringent as federal supplemental security income disability standards;

(b) Are citizens or aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residence or otherwise residing in the United States under color of law, or are victims of human trafficking as defined in RCW 74.04.005;

(c)(i) Have furnished the department with their social security number. If the social security number cannot be furnished because it has not been issued or is not known, an application for a number must be made prior to authorization of benefits, and the social security number must be provided to the department upon receipt;

(ii) This requirement does not apply to victims of human trafficking as defined in RCW 74.04.005 if they have not been issued a social security number;

(d)(i) Have countable income as described in RCW 74.04.005 at or below ((~~four hundred twenty-eight dollars~~)) $428 for a married couple or at or below ((~~three hundred thirty-nine dollars~~)) $390 for a single individual; or

(ii) Have income that meets the standard established by the department, who are eligible for the pregnant women assistance program;

(e) Do not have countable resources in excess of those described in RCW 74.04.005; and

(f) Are not eligible for federal aid assistance, other than basic food benefits transferred electronically and medical assistance.

(2) Eligibility authorizations for essential needs and housing support are effective for 12 months from the date the department of social and health services remits its first rent subsidy on behalf of the recipient.

(3) Recipients of aged, blind, or disabled assistance program benefits who meet other eligibility requirements in this section are eligible for a referral for essential needs and housing support services within funds appropriated for the department of commerce.

((~~(3)~~)) (4) Recipients of pregnant women assistance program benefits who meet other eligibility requirements in this section are eligible for referral for essential needs and housing support services, within funds appropriated for the department of commerce, for ((~~twenty-four~~)) 24 consecutive months from the date the department determines pregnant women assistance program eligibility.

((~~(4)~~)) (5) The following persons are not eligible for a referral for essential needs and housing support:

(a) Persons who refuse or fail to cooperate in obtaining federal aid assistance, without good cause;

(b) Persons who refuse or fail without good cause to participate in substance use treatment if an assessment by a certified substance use disorder professional indicates a need for such treatment. Good cause must be found to exist when a person's physical or mental condition, as determined by the department, prevents the person from participating in substance use treatment, when needed outpatient treatment is not available to the person in the county of their residence or when needed inpatient treatment is not available in a location that is reasonably accessible for the person; and

(c) Persons who are fleeing to avoid prosecution of, or to avoid custody or confinement for conviction of, a felony, or an attempt to commit a felony, under the laws of the state of Washington or the place from which the person flees; or who are violating a condition of probation, community supervision, or parole imposed under federal or state law for a felony or gross misdemeanor conviction.

((~~(5)~~)) (6) For purposes of determining whether a person is incapacitated from gainful employment under subsection (1) of this section:

(a) The department shall adopt by rule medical criteria for incapacity determinations to ensure that eligibility decisions are consistent with statutory requirements and are based on clear, objective medical information; and

(b) The process implementing the medical criteria must involve consideration of opinions of the treating or consulting physicians or health care professionals regarding incapacity, and any eligibility decision which rejects uncontroverted medical opinion must set forth clear and convincing reasons for doing so.

((~~(6)~~)) (7) For purposes of reviewing a person's continuing eligibility and in order to remain eligible for ((~~the program~~)) a new 12-month authorization period, persons who have been found to have an incapacity from gainful employment must demonstrate that there has been no material improvement in their medical or mental health condition. The department may discontinue benefits when there was specific error in the prior determination that found the person eligible by reason of incapacitation.

((~~(7)~~)) (8) The department must review the cases of all persons who have received benefits under the essential needs and housing support program for ((~~twelve~~)) 12 consecutive months, and at least annually after the first review, to determine whether they are eligible for the aged, blind, or disabled assistance program.

(9) The department shall share client data for individuals eligible for essential needs and housing support with the department of commerce and designated essential needs and housing support entities as required under RCW 43.185C.230.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.62.030 and 2022 c 208 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) The aged, blind, or disabled assistance program shall provide financial grants to persons in need who:

(i) Are not eligible to receive federal aid assistance, other than basic food benefits transferred electronically and medical assistance;

(ii) Meet the eligibility requirements of subsection (3) of this section; and

(iii) Are aged, blind, or disabled. For purposes of determining eligibility for assistance for the aged, blind, or disabled assistance program, the following definitions apply:

(A) "Aged" means age ((~~sixty-five~~)) 65 or older.

(B) "Blind" means statutorily blind as defined for the purpose of determining eligibility for the federal supplemental security income program.

(C) "Disabled" means likely to meet the federal supplemental security income disability standard. In making this determination, the department should give full consideration to the cumulative impact of an applicant's multiple impairments, an applicant's age, and vocational and educational history.

In determining whether a person is disabled, the department may rely on, but is not limited to, the following:

(I) A previous disability determination by the social security administration or the disability determination service entity within the department; or

(II) A determination that an individual is eligible to receive optional categorically needy medicaid as a disabled person under the federal regulations at 42 C.F.R. Parts 435, Secs. 201(a)(3) and 210.

(b) The following persons are not eligible for the aged, blind, or disabled assistance program:

(i) Persons who are not able to engage in gainful employment due primarily to a substance use disorder. These persons shall be referred to appropriate assessment, treatment, or shelter services. Referrals shall be made at the time of application or at the time of eligibility review. This subsection may not be construed to prohibit the department from granting aged, blind, or disabled assistance benefits to persons with a substance use disorder who are incapacitated due to other physical or mental conditions that meet the eligibility criteria for the aged, blind, or disabled assistance program; or

(ii) Persons for whom there has been a final determination of ineligibility based on age, blindness, or disability for federal supplemental security income benefits.

(c) Persons may receive aged, blind, or disabled assistance benefits and essential needs and housing program support under RCW 43.185C.220 concurrently while pending application for federal supplemental security income benefits. ((~~The monetary value of any aged, blind, or disabled assistance benefit that is subsequently duplicated by the person's receipt of supplemental security income for the same period shall be considered a debt due the state and shall by operation of law be subject to recovery through all available legal remedies.~~))

(2) The pregnant women assistance program shall provide financial grants to persons who:

(a) Are not eligible to receive federal aid assistance other than basic food benefits or medical assistance; and

(b) Are pregnant and in need, based upon the current income and resource standards of the federal temporary assistance for needy families program, but are ineligible for federal temporary assistance for needy families benefits for a reason other than failure to cooperate in program requirements; and

(c) Meet the eligibility requirements of subsection (3) of this section.

(3) To be eligible for the aged, blind, or disabled assistance program under subsection (1) of this section or the pregnant women assistance program under subsection (2) of this section, a person must:

(a) Be a citizen or alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence or otherwise residing in the United States under color of law, or be a victim of human trafficking as defined in RCW 74.04.005;

(b) Meet the income and resource standards described in RCW 74.04.805(1) (d) and (e);

(c)(i) Have furnished the department with their social security number. If the social security number cannot be furnished because it has not been issued or is not known, an application for a number shall be made prior to authorization of benefits, and the social security number shall be provided to the department upon receipt;

(ii) This requirement does not apply to victims of human trafficking as defined in RCW 74.04.005 if they have not been issued a social security number;

(d) Not have refused or failed without good cause to participate in substance use treatment if an assessment by a certified substance use disorder professional indicates a need for such treatment. Good cause must be found to exist when a person's physical or mental condition, as determined by the department, prevents the person from participating in substance use treatment, when needed outpatient treatment is not available to the person in the county of their residence or when needed inpatient treatment is not available in a location that is reasonably accessible for the person; and

(e) Not have refused or failed to cooperate in obtaining federal aid assistance, without good cause.

(4) Referrals for essential needs and housing support under RCW 43.185C.220 shall be provided to persons found eligible under RCW 74.04.805.

(5) No person may be considered an eligible individual for benefits under this section with respect to any month if during that month the person:

(a) Is fleeing to avoid prosecution of, or to avoid custody or confinement for conviction of, a felony, or an attempt to commit a felony, under the laws of the state of Washington or the place from which the person flees; or

(b) Is violating a condition of probation, community supervision, or parole imposed under federal or state law for a felony or gross misdemeanor conviction.

(6) The department must share client data for individuals eligible for essential needs and housing support with the department of commerce and designated essential needs and housing support entities as required under RCW 43.185C.230.

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