
**Human Services, Youth, & Early
Learning Committee**

HB 1988

Brief Description: Establishing the customer voice council.

Sponsors: Representatives Simmons, Couture, Ramel, Reed and Reeves; by request of Department of Social and Health Services.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to establish a statewide public assistance customer voice council composed of current or former recipients of state public assistance.
- Requires the DSHS to ensure the establishment of, and provide staffing assistance to, local community partnership groups with various functions related to local public assistance programs and practices.

Hearing Date: 1/19/24

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

The DSHS Economic Services Administration.

The DSHS Economic Services Administration (ESA) administers numerous assistance programs for the state, including: the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and State Family Assistance (SFA) programs; WorkFirst; Basic Food; The Aged, Blind, or Disabled Program; the Pregnant Women's Assistance Program; and Refugee Cash Assistance. The ESA is also responsible for the administration of child support enforcement and financial recovery and disability determinations for Social Security disability benefits.

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

WorkFirst.

The WorkFirst program provides employment, training, and support services for TANF and SFA recipients to help them move toward economic stability. Examples of WorkFirst services include case management and referrals to social services, education and training services for wage progression and job retention, and assistance preparing for and looking for work. In general, adult TANF and SFA recipients must participate in one or more WorkFirst activities that are identified in the participant's individual responsibility plan.

The DSHS must, through its regional offices, develop work programs that are effective and work in local communities. In doing so, the DSHS must collaborate with employers, recipients, frontline workers, educational institutions, labor, private industry councils, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, community rehabilitation employment programs, employment and training agencies, local governments, the Employment Security Department, and community action agencies. For planning purposes, the DSHS must collect and make accessible to regional offices successful work program models from around the country, including the Employment Partnership Program, apprenticeship programs, microcredit, microenterprise, self-employment, and W-2 Wisconsin Works.

The DSHS must establish WorkFirst service areas for purposes of program planning and distribution of resources. Every two years, a plan for the WorkFirst program must be developed for each region in consultation with local and regional sources and must include input from local and regional planning bodies for social services and workforce development.

The Legislative Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Oversight Task Force.

The Legislative-Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Oversight Task Force (LEWPRO) oversees the operation of WorkFirst and TANF. The LEWPRO is additionally responsible for: developing and monitoring strategies to address adverse childhood experiences and reduce intergenerational poverty, in collaboration with the Intergenerational Poverty Advisory Committee (IPAC); seeking input from various entities on best practices for poverty reduction; analyzing available data regarding intergenerational poverty; and recommending policies to the Governor and the Legislature to reduce intergenerational poverty and promote and encourage self-sufficiency.

The Intergenerational Poverty Advisory Committee.

The IPAC is composed of public, non-profit, and for-profit entities and was created to advise the LEWPRO. The IPAC is tasked with gathering input from diverse communities about the impact of intergenerational poverty on outcomes such as education, health care, employment, involvement in the child welfare system, and making data-supported recommendations to the LEWPRO on how to effectively address the needs of children affected by intergenerational poverty.

Summary of Bill:

Customer Voice Council.

Effective July 1, 2025, the DSHS must establish a statewide public assistance customer voice council and provide staffing and training to support the council. Members of the council must be current or former recipients of state public assistance and may be paid a stipend for participation. In setting policies and membership for the customer voice council the DSHS must consult with the LEWPRO, the IPAC, and local community partnership groups.

Local Community Partnership Groups.

The DSHS must ensure that local community partnership groups are established, and must provide staffing assistance to these groups. Communities may determine the specific structure and composition of these groups based on community needs and existing resources. Local community partnership groups must meet at least quarterly and must:

- elevate customer voices in the development and evaluation of local public assistance practices, providing experience to support participation in the customer voice council that is established in the bill;
- promote effective communication and collaboration among the DSHS's local community service offices, people with experience living in poverty, local governments, community action agencies, and other service providers;
- advise and comment on DSHS program policies;
- work to resolve local issues including client referral and service gaps;
- review local data and racial, ethnic, and other disproportionality trends;
- review public assistance client feedback;
- propose innovative and evidence-based collaborative services; and
- provide input for the local WorkFirst plans.

Beginning in 2025, local community partnership groups are responsible for developing the plan every two years for the local aspects of the WorkFirst program and the plan is expanded to include other poverty reduction efforts for each region. In completing the plan development, the local community partnership groups must gather input from current or former WorkFirst participants and other public assistance recipients, in addition to local and regional planning bodies for social services and workforce development.

Other Changes.

The entities and interest groups that the DSHS must collaborate with to develop work programs is modified to: include both current and former public assistance recipients; add the workforce development councils and organizations serving refugees and immigrants; and remove references to private industry councils and rehabilitation employment programs. The DSHS must develop assistance services, in addition to work programs, that are effective and work in communities.

The DSHS must make collect successful public assistance program models from around the country, in addition to work program models, and must make these models accessible to local community partnership groups, in addition to regional offices. References to specific work program models are removed.

Legislative findings are changed and terminology is modified in multiple places to use updated terms.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 11, 2024.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.