

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2007

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Human Services, February 20, 2024
Ways & Means, February 26, 2024

Title: An act relating to expanding time limit exemptions applicable to cash assistance programs.

Brief Description: Expanding time limit exemptions applicable to cash assistance programs.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Peterson, Gregerson, Alvarado, Berry, Senn, Morgan, Leavitt, Reed, Ormsby, Kloba, Macri, Doglio, Bergquist, Goodman, Ortiz-Self, Santos and Hackney).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/13/24, 85-11.

Committee Activity: Human Services: 2/19/24, 2/20/24 [DPA-WM, w/oRec].
Ways & Means: 2/23/24, 2/26/24 [DPA, DNP, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Amended Bill

- Expands time limit extensions in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program to include recipients who are parents or legal guardians to a child under the age of two who lives in the same household and who qualify for an infant, toddler, or postpartum exemption from WorkFirst activities.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.
Signed by Senators Wilson, C., Chair; Kauffman, Vice Chair; Frame and Nguyen.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.
Signed by Senators Boehnke, Ranking Member; Warnick and Wilson, J..

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.

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Robinson, Chair; Mullet, Vice Chair, Capital; Nguyen, Vice Chair, Operating; Billig, Conway, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Pedersen, Randall, Saldaña, Van De Wege and Wellman.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital; Boehnke.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Wilson, L., Ranking Member, Operating; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Rivers, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Braun, Muzzall, Torres and Wagoner.

Staff: Josh Hinman (786-7281)

Background: The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is a federally funded program that provides cash assistance to parents or caregivers with children and pregnant individuals to help meet foundational needs. Persons who are caring for a relative's child, are legal guardians, or who are acting in the place of a parent, are also able to apply for TANF benefits on behalf of these children. To be eligible for TANF benefits, a person must meet certain income and resource limits and meet citizenship criteria.

Time Limit Extensions. Federal rules limit the length of time an adult may receive TANF benefits to a cumulative total of 60 months. Time limit extensions may be offered to families on the basis of hardship, as defined by the state, or in instances of family violence. States can extend federal TANF assistance beyond the 60-month limit for up to 20 percent of the average monthly caseload.

Statute and rules adopted by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) identify certain circumstances in which a person is eligible for a time limit extension, by reason of hardship, including when the recipient is:

- age 55 or older and caring for a relative or child when the recipient is not the parent;
- a disabled adult;
- caring for a disabled adult;
- caring for a disabled child;
- required to apply for social security income or social security disability insurance;
- participating in a family violence service plan;
- involved in a first-time child welfare case;
- employed for 32 hours or more per week of unsubsidized employment;

- receiving benefits pending an administrative law judge decision;
- homeless;
- caring for a homeless child or youth; and
- receiving or was receiving TANF during a period of high unemployment—when the unemployment rate was at 7 percent or higher.

WorkFirst Exemptions. The WorkFirst program provides a variety of services for families on the TANF program, including job training, education, English language training, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and domestic violence services. Families receiving TANF are required to participate in the WorkFirst program, unless they are exempt, as defined by DSHS in rule. TANF participants may be exempt from WorkFirst participation if they:

- are the parent or legal guardian of a child under the age of two;
- are a needy caregiver relative and aged 55 or older;
- have a severe and chronic medically verified condition (including individuals likely to be approved for Supplemental Security Income or other federal benefits);
- are in the home to care for a child with special needs; and
- or are in the home to care for an adult relative with a severe and chronic medical condition.

Summary of Amended Bill: If a TANF recipient is a parent or legal guardian to a child under the age of two who lives in the same household and qualifies for an infant, toddler, or postpartum exemption from WorkFirst activities, that recipient is eligible for a TANF time limit extension.

EFFECT OF WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE AMENDMENT(S):

- Modifies the requirement to allow for a time limit extension if the recipient qualifies for an infant, toddler, or postpartum exemption from WorkFirst activities.

Appropriation: The bill contains a null and void clause requiring specific funding be provided in an omnibus appropriation act.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: July 1, 2024.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Proposed Striking Amendment (Human Services): PRO: TANF is a critical lifeline and the only benefit with a federal lifetime limit. During the Great Recession many cuts were made to exemptions and since then progress has been made adding exemptions back. This ensures that those who need help can get it, although more still needs to be done. This is helpful for families experiencing

domestic violence who either don't know about the family violence exemption or don't want or don't feel safe disclosing their situation. Or, the family isn't believed - those who are not believed are disproportionately people of color. If people get turned away, it's another reason to return to the abuser. Adding this exemption increases safety and stability.

OTHER: Increasing time limit exemptions aligns with poverty reduction efforts.

Persons Testifying (Human Services): PRO: Lianna Kressin, Statewide Poverty Action Network; Em Stone, WA State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

OTHER: Babs Roberts, DSHS - Economic Services Administration - Community Services Division.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Human Services): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Bill as Amended by Human Services (Ways & Means): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.*

PRO: Allowing TANF for a family with a child under age two is of particular importance to survivors of domestic violence. These survivors must disclose their domestic violence in their application and may be uncomfortable doing so or it may be unsafe. An application may be denied for this reason or the victim may not be believed. This expansion would allow applicants to no longer disclose domestic violence and would thereby limit opportunities for biased determinations. Losing TANF may cause some to return to abusers.

Testifier reminds the Committee that Washington used to have a broader time limit extension prior to the Great Recession. Washington used to support those in need, who are in deep poverty, to make sure they can take care of their children. During the Great Recession, significant cuts placed narrower limits on TANF. This bill continues the work to expand TANF access and takes an important step to make sure families with the youngest children retain TANF.

TANF can be a critical lifeline to help one meet basic needs. TANF is the only public assistance program with a lifetime limit. A family of three cannot make more than \$1,412 per month, or approximately \$17,000 per a year, and remain on TANF. This is \$8,000 less than the Federal Poverty Level. Families who qualified past their time limit should be able to get it.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Lianna Kressin, Statewide Poverty Action Network; Em Stone, WA State Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Alex Hur, SPAN.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.