

---

SENATE BILL 5854

---

State of Washington                      52nd Legislature                      1991 Regular Session

By Senators Conner, Craswell, Stratton and McMullen.

Read first time February 26, 1991. Referred to Committee on Children & Family Services.

1            AN ACT Relating to children in poverty; adding a new chapter to  
2 Title 74 RCW; creating a new section; and making an appropriation.

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

4            NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 1.**            It is the intent of the legislature to  
5 provide effective, timely aid and intervention to poor children and  
6 families throughout the state of Washington, thus improving their  
7 quality of life and reducing future costs to society in general, by  
8 means of direct assistance to community action agencies.    The  
9 legislature finds that:

10            (1) It is well-established that children living in poverty are  
11 inherently at risk, and that the future costs to society arising from  
12 the many problems directly related to child and family poverty are  
13 enormous.

14            (2) Recent economic and social trends related to the erosion of  
15 traditional family structures, massive but uneven patterns of growth,

1 economic crisis in the Washington timber region, and pervasive rural  
2 and urban problems of unemployment, homelessness, discrimination, and  
3 poverty are rapidly increasing the number of poor children living in  
4 the state of Washington.

5 (3) Timely, positive intervention in the lives of poor children is  
6 extremely valuable and cost-effective, and can often prevent the  
7 development of dysfunctional behaviors that are harmful and costly to  
8 society in general, as is demonstrated by the fact that it currently  
9 costs taxpayers as much to maintain a prisoner for one year as to  
10 educate a child for twelve years.

11 (4) The problem of youth and family poverty is in the first  
12 instance a community problem, and existing efforts by community action  
13 agencies to enhance the quality of life for poor children and families  
14 have demonstrated the value of a comprehensive, locally oriented  
15 approach; and

16 (5) Community action agencies currently lack sufficient resources  
17 to adequately address the immense challenges posed by child and family  
18 poverty, and it is thus necessary and prudent for the state of  
19 Washington to begin redressing the omissions of the past by acting in  
20 the best interests of present and future generations of Washington's  
21 children.

22 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** Unless the context clearly requires  
23 otherwise, the definitions in this section apply throughout this  
24 chapter.

25 (1) "Department" means the department of community development.

26 (2) "Community action agencies" means the state-wide network of  
27 community action agencies, organized on a local level, currently  
28 providing direct assistance and referral services to low-income  
29 families, as referred to in RCW 43.63A.105.

1 (3) "Eligible at-risk families" means those families whose incomes  
2 are at or below one hundred twenty-five percent of the federal poverty  
3 level, as defined by the federal energy assistance program, containing  
4 one or more children ten years of age or younger.

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The department is directed to provide  
6 substantial, material assistance to community action agencies, by means  
7 of community services block grants, distributed in accordance to  
8 established formula and administered under the name of "community child  
9 poverty project," to aid Washington's poor children and families  
10 through the active implementation of the following policy goals:

11 (1) The comprehensive identification by community action agencies  
12 of eligible at-risk families;

13 (2) Aiding community action agencies in providing emergency  
14 services and referrals to eligible at-risk families, as well as helping  
15 these families to attain long-term stability and self-sufficiency, with  
16 special emphasis upon enhanced funding for food banks, energy  
17 assistance, and job-related assistance, training, and child care;

18 (3) The development and administration of needs assessments by  
19 community action agencies to one hundred thousand eligible at-risk  
20 families, and the assignment of individual family resource specialists  
21 to at least five thousand of these families not currently being served  
22 by case managers;

23 (4) The involvement of other local agencies in providing assistance  
24 to eligible at-risk families by means of subcontracts between community  
25 action agencies and other local agencies, with the proviso that the  
26 subcontracts must be funded by previously awarded block grants and  
27 reported to the legislature under the provisions of section 5 of this  
28 act;

1 (5) The development and distribution of a comprehensive, community-  
2 oriented child and family resource guide to aid in the identification  
3 and referral of needed services for poor children and families at the  
4 county and community level; and

5 (6) The recognition of the paramountcy of local control and local  
6 citizen participation in the development of the child poverty project,  
7 and an equal recognition of the need to limit program and bureaucratic  
8 costs to the taxpayers while maximizing the actual assistance provided  
9 to poor children and families.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** The child poverty project coordinating  
11 council, composed of representatives from community action agencies  
12 from across Washington, is hereby created to develop and implement the  
13 child poverty project under the policy goals outlined in section 3 of  
14 this act, and under the general review and oversight of the department.

15 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** The child poverty project coordinating  
16 council shall commission a full assessment of the child poverty  
17 project, to be submitted to the legislature no later than January 31,  
18 1993.

19 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** The sum of eight million dollars, or as  
20 much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated for the biennium  
21 ending June 30, 1993, from the general fund to the department of  
22 community development for the purposes of this act. Of these funds,  
23 two hundred fifty thousand dollars shall be set aside for the  
24 assessment required by section 4 of this act, and a further one hundred  
25 fifty thousand dollars shall be set aside for costs incurred by the  
26 department for its share in the support and administration of the child  
27 poverty project.

1        NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 7.**        This chapter may be known and cited as  
2 the child poverty assessment and assistance act.

3        NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 8.**        Sections 1 through 5 of this act shall  
4 constitute a new chapter in Title 74 RCW.