

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1980

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to work activity requirements under the temporary assistance for needy families program.

Brief Description: Changing work activity provisions under the TANF program.

Sponsors: Representative Boldt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/26/03, 2/27/03 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to assess each WorkFirst recipient within four weeks of becoming eligible for the program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Darneille, Vice Chair; Boldt, Ranking Minority Member; Roach, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Dickerson, Miloscia, Pettigrew and Shabro.

Staff: Sonja Hallum (786-7092).

Background:

In 1996 federal law abolished welfare as an entitlement and replaced it with a program called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) that limits benefits to five years in an adult's lifetime. In 1997 the Washington State Legislature created Washington's own welfare reform program, the WorkFirst program, which was designed to comply with the federal requirements.

The 1997 bill establishing the WorkFirst program included a section which set out a "job search component" to the WorkFirst requirement. This section of the bill was vetoed by the Governor before it was enacted. In 1998 a new statute was enacted containing a

more broadly defined "job search component" than that set out in the 1997 bill.

The WorkFirst program provides services to assist people to gain and maintain employment. Some of the specific services provided by WorkFirst include job search, education, jobs skills training, subsidized community jobs, and on-the-job training. In addition, there are services more tailored to the individual needs of the participant such as child care, transportation, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence counseling, and medical care.

The WorkFirst program utilizes two primary assessment tools. The first tool is the e-JAS screening/evaluation which is an automated tool for case managers, social workers, and job service specialists to screen for issues that can interfere with employment and retention. The second tool is the assessment which is a more comprehensive tool used by a social worker to gather detailed information about a participant's life and issues that may impact her or his ability to support the participant's family.

There is not a specific time set out in statute stating when an assessment must take place.

Summary of Bill:

The bill deletes language which references a section of the statute which was vetoed by the Governor when the original bill was passed in 1997.

The Department of Social and Health Services (Department) is required to assess each WorkFirst recipient within four weeks of becoming eligible for the WorkFirst program rather than upon completion of the job search component.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: People are becoming eligible and going to work. After becoming discouraged they come back and get assessed. Employers are saying "Why are you sending them to me?" People have gone through the system for five years and cannot speak English and that should be dealt with. While the Department may indicate they are doing this, many people have felt frustration that people come into the program and are immediately set to work without being evaluated. This legislation is geared toward having the assessment early on. If you spend more time with people up front it will be more beneficial. This bill would have a family come in and a more extensive evaluation

would be done.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Boldt, prime sponsor; and Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.