

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1980

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Children & Family Services & Corrections, April 4, 2003

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 & Corrections: 3/26/03, 4/4/03 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Stevens, Chair; Parlette, Vice Chair; Carlson, Deccio, Hargrove, McAuliffe and Regala.

Staff: Edith Rice (786-7444)

Background: In 1996, federal law abolished welfare as an entitlement and replaced it with a program called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). 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 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 a more comprehensive assessment 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 Amended Bill: Language is deleted that 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 must assess each WorkFirst recipient once he or she becomes eligible for the WorkFirst program. Upon referral to job search, recipients must receive a job skills assessment.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The department must assess recipient barriers to employment before he or she is referred to job search. Upon referral to job search, recipients must receive a job skills assessment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Recipients with significant barriers are being referred to jobs before they are ready. This is frustrating to recipients as well as potential employers. This will clarify that assessments need to be done up front, before a recipient with issues that need to be addressed, experiences failure.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Marc Boldt, prime sponsor; Lonnie Johns-Brown, WAEYC (pro).