

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6628

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, February 1, 2006
Ways & Means, February 7, 2006

Title: An act relating to preserving the WorkFirst child safety net program.

Brief Description: Preserving the WorkFirst child safety net program.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley, Regala, Thibaudeau, Keiser, Kline, McAuliffe and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/23/06, 2/1/06 [DPS].
Ways & Means: 2/7/06 [DPS(HSC), w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6628 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, McAuliffe and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Indu Thomas (786-7459)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6628 as recommended by Committee on Human Services & Corrections be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Doumit, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Fairley, Kohl-Welles, Parlette, Pridemore, Rasmussen, Regala, Rockefeller and Thibaudeau.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Pflug and Schoesler.

Staff: Chelsea Buchanan (786-7446)

Background: The federal Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 replaced the federal and state entitlement program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, a block grant program to states. TANF has strict overall federal work participation requirements; however, states have flexibility to design their own assistance programs, such as how much of a reduction in grant funding is permissible when families do not meet participation requirements.

In 1997, the Legislature and Governor Locke created WorkFirst, Washington state's TANF program. WorkFirst is funded through fixed federal block grants and state matching funds that the Legislature gave the Governor the authority to manage. The program includes cash grants, job training and employment services, social services, and subsidized child care for TANF-eligible and other low-income families.

As allowed under statute, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) currently does not terminate cash grants to a TANF-eligible family based upon a parent's refusal to participate in the WorkFirst program. Instead, DSHS imposes a 40 percent sanction leaving a 60 percent payment to the family known as the "child safety net," and this payment may be paid to a protective payee. "Full family sanction" is the term applied to a termination of a family grant when a recipient refuses to engage in the required work or work activities.

The WorkFirst program is projected to have a shortfall of over \$100 million for the 2005-07 biennium. In the summer of 2005, Governor Gregoire convened the WorkFirst Reexamination Workgroup to conduct a full-scale review of the program. At the Governor's request, the Workgroup submitted recommendations intended to make the program sustainable based on its current budget. The Governor did not propose implementing all of the cuts the Workgroup recommended; however, the Governor did propose full family sanctions for all TANF recipients who are not actively participating in the program.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Current law is changed to require DSHS to exempt families refusing to meet participation requirements from full-family sanctions. DSHS must maintain child safety net payments of no less than sixty percent of a family's monthly grant, and the grant must be paid to a protective payee.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: When a family is receiving child safety net payments, a protective payee must be assigned to pay for the basic needs of the household and to hold the remaining funds to provide for the needs of the child.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For (Human Services & Corrections): Children are unable to choose their parents. There must be a way in which to make sure that the children are not cut off from their basic needs while encouraging parents to participate in their work activities. Sanctioned families are more likely to end up in the child welfare system. The measure of success should be getting families into jobs with livable wages. DSHS caseworkers appear to be experiencing pressure to get TANF recipients off of the rolls. It is very important to support families and keep them together. This tendency should be assessed prior to imposing full family sanctions.

Testimony Against (Human Services & Corrections): This is part of the WorkFirst Re-Examination Project. DSHS must work to make the TANF program sustainable. The department is corroborating the self-reported reasons for sanctions. Caseworkers are able to provide clothing and transportation assistance. People are not sanctioned because of domestic violence, lack of transportation or lack of child care. The Governor's proposal allows 6

months prior to the imposition of full-family sanctions. In addition, caseworkers are required to work with families during that 6 month period to prevent the need for sanctions.

Who Testified (Human Services & Corrections): PRO: Senator Fairley, prime sponsor; Elizabeth Schott, citizen; Tyra Lindquist, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Tony Lee, Fremont Public Association; Sarah Cherin, Children's Alliance; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society; Monica Peabody and Holly Jones, Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition.

CON: Deb Marley, DSHS.

Testimony For (Ways & Means): This bill is important to protect children. The fiscal impact shown on the fiscal note may be too high. Instead of imposing full family sanctions, the Legislature could cut Job Search programs or direct the Governor to find savings in another manner.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): None.

Who Testified (Ways & Means): PRO: Tony Lee, Fremont Public Association.