

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2312

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Children's Services

Title: An act relating to legislative oversight of WorkFirst and temporary assistance to needy families.

Brief Description: Providing legislative oversight of WorkFirst and temporary assistance to needy families.

Sponsors: Representatives Walsh, Kagi, Morrell and Kenney.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 2/23/07 [DPS].

<p>Brief Summary of Substitute Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates the WorkFirst Oversight Committee.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Hinkle, Pettigrew and Roberts.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

WorkFirst is Washington's welfare-to-work strategy. Washington initiated the WorkFirst program in August 1997 to help low-income families become self-sufficient by providing training and support services necessary for parents to get a job, keep a job and move up a career ladder.

Four state agencies jointly carry out WorkFirst: the Department of Social and Health Services; the Employment Security Department; the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Local employers, tribal governments, Workforce Development Councils and community organizations are key partners in planning and providing services for WorkFirst participants.

When WorkFirst began in 1997, it was decided that the heads of the partner agencies listed above would form the WorkFirst Subcabinet. The Subcabinet is chaired by the Director of the Office of Financial Management and meets several times a year to coordinate and make decisions about high-level policy and budget issues. The WorkFirst program manages approximately \$830 million annually.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The WorkFirst Oversight Committee (Committee) is established for the purpose of monitoring the state's effectiveness in promoting personal responsibility among recipients and in helping them attain long-term self-sufficiency. The Committee consists of four legislators, one from each major caucus in each chamber of the Legislature, and the members of the WorkFirst Subcabinet. The Committee will meet quarterly and will receive written reports on a monthly or quarterly basis related to:

- (1) work participation rates;
- (2) the number of persons who left WorkFirst and entered the workforce;
- (3) the number of persons enrolled in post-employment support programs;
- (4) the percentage increase in earnings capacity for recipients who exited WorkFirst and entered the workforce;
- (5) the number of persons in sanction status for nonparticipation;
- (6) program expenditures in each major activity; and
- (7) the number of recipients receiving working connections child care subsidies.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill makes the following changes to the original bill:

- (1) renames the oversight committee established in the bill as the WorkFirst Oversight Committee to reflect the composition of the committee; and
- (2) specifies that certain written reports will be provided monthly and other written reports will be provided quarterly to reflect the current reporting schedule for the measures listed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 24, 2007.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The time has come and we have decided it is a good idea to be working more closely in collaboration with the Subcabinet. Over the years we have had to call on legislators to fix problems with the WorkFirst program. We do need a vehicle to bring concerns to elected officials. When WorkFirst isn't working, not only are families hurt, but cities and counties are also stressed.

This bill brings the Legislature into a closer role in managing the WorkFirst program and at the same time maintains the flexibility of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) box approach to multiple agency management of the program. Bringing designated legislators to the table with the Subcabinet will ensure attention to the WorkFirst program in times of relative normalcy as well as times of crisis, which can only strengthen the program. Nationally, Washington is rather unique. Most states, in fact all other states, have greater legislative involvement in managing their TANF expenditures.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Walsh, prime sponsor; Monica Peabody, Welfare Rights Organizing Coalitions; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society of Washington; and Robin Zukoski, Columbia Legal Services.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.