

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 6016

As Passed House - Amended:

April 11, 2007

Title: An act relating to good cause reasons for failure to participate in WorkFirst program components.

Brief Description: Concerning good cause reasons for failure to participate in WorkFirst program components.

Sponsors: By Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Regala and Kohl-Welles).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 3/29/07 [DPA];

Appropriations: 3/31/07 [DPA(APP w/o ELCS)s].

Floor Activity:

Passed House - Amended: 4/11/07, 66-31.

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill (As Amended by House)

- Revises participation requirements under WorkFirst for a parent with a child under the age of one year.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Pettigrew and Roberts.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Haler, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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.

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Appropriations and without amendment by Committee on Early Learning & Children's Services. Signed by 22 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Dunshee, Vice Chair; Cody, Conway, Darneille, Ericks, Fromhold, Grant, Haigh, Hunt, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDonald, McIntire, Morrell, Pettigrew, Schual-Berke, Seaquist and P. Sullivan.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Buri, Chandler, Dunn, Kretz and Priest.

Staff: Amy Skei (786-7140).

Background:

WorkFirst is Washington's program of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under WorkFirst, recipients of public assistance are assessed prior to referral to job search activities. Information obtained through the assessment is used to develop an individual responsibility plan (IRP) that includes an employment goal; a plan for obtaining employment as quickly as possible; and a description of services available to enable the recipient to obtain and keep employment.

Unless a good cause exemption applies, recipients of public assistance must be engaged in work or work activities as a condition of continued eligibility. Good cause exemptions include situations where necessary child care is unavailable for an incapacitated or dependent child under age six, and situations where a parent has a child under one year of age. State law allows a parent to claim the exemption for parenting a child under one year only once for one child. Federal regulations permit applying this exemption up to a maximum of 12 months for the individual's lifetime.

For a recipient claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under one year of age, an assessment is conducted to determine specific service needs or employment barriers, including substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or domestic violence services. Information from the assessment is used in developing the parent's IRP.

Beginning when the child is three months old, the parent is required to participate in one or more specified activities for up to 20 hours per week. These activities include: parenting skills instruction or training; job readiness training; high-school diploma or general educational development (GED) certificate courses; or volunteering in a licensed child-care facility.

Summary of Amended Bill:

For a parent claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under one year of age, the requirement to participate in specified activities when the child reaches three months of age is replaced with a general requirement for the parent to participate up to a maximum total of 20 hours per week in one or more of the following activities, if such treatment, services, or training is indicated by a comprehensive evaluation or assessment:

- (a) mental health treatment;
- (b) alcohol or drug treatment;
- (c) domestic violence services; or
- (d) parenting education or parenting skills training.

The DSHS is directed to assisting parents claiming the exemption in identifying and accessing programs and services to improve parenting skills and promote child well-being, including but not limited to voluntary home visitation programs. WorkFirst caseworkers will be provided with information about the availability of home visitation services and will share the information with parents who are claiming the exemption. If desired by a parent, the WorkFirst caseworker will facilitate a referral to a home visitation service provider. The one-time one-child limit on claiming a good cause exemption for parenting a child under the age of one year is replaced with maximum total limit of 12 months over a parent's lifetime.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on April 2, 2007.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: (Early Learning & Children's Services)

(In support) The first year of a child's life is an important and critical time for parental bonding. Infant child care is very expensive and often very hard to find. Until we roll out a Quality Rating and Improvement System the quality is not always of the level that very young children need. This bill is practical and very complementary to the work being done on early learning initiatives.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: (Appropriations)

(In support) Infant child care is very expensive and is difficult to find. We cannot guarantee that what is available is of high quality. That should be of concern because we recognize these early months are critical months for learning. The federal government allows states to utilize the full 12 month lifetime exemption and count it as an allowable activity. This has not changed under the recent federal changes. Moving from three months to 12 months is compatible with encouraging good education outcomes for our children.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (Early Learning & Children's Services) Lonnie Johns-Brown, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children.

Persons Testifying: (Appropriations) Lonnie Johns-Brown, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Early Learning & Children's Services)
None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Appropriations) None.