
Human Services Committee

HB 2782

Brief Description: Reorganizing delivery of services to recipients of public assistance.

Sponsors: Representatives Dickerson, Appleton, McCoy, Carlyle, Morrell, Kagi, Kessler, Green, Ericks, Moeller, Roberts, Nelson and Orwall.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a working group comprised of philanthropic organizations, state agencies, community nonprofit organizations and others to select a software provider for a web-based Opportunity Portal to allow Washington residents to access a broad array of benefits; the selection must be complete by August 2010. If sufficient private funding is not secured by December 31, 2010, the authorization for the Opportunity Portal is null and void.
- Expands the Food Stamp and Training Program, subject to federal approval, to add three additional community colleges in 2010.
- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the Employment Security Department, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to seek out community organizations that can provide support services and case management services for participants in the Food Stamp and Training Program and to identify and obtain federal matching funds for employment and training services.
- Renames the General Assistance Program as the "Disability Lifeline Program."
- Requires the DSHS to review medical and other relevant evidence to identify applicants for Disability Lifeline benefits who are likely eligible for Federal Supplemental Security Income benefits and to transfer those individuals onto the Disability Lifeline Expedited Program no later than 90 days after initial eligibility is determined.
- Requires that individuals who lose Disability Lifeline Benefits due to improvements in health status be given high priority for enrollment in the Basic Health Plan if they are eligible.

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.

- Requires that individuals for whom chemical treatment is necessary for the improvement of his or her health status for transition to employment or federal benefits be given high priority for enrollment in chemical dependency programs.
- Requires the DSHS and the entity which contracts for medical care services for Disability Lifeline clients to establish a pilot program for homeless persons eligible for Disability Lifeline benefits in up to two counties; participants would receive a reduced monthly Disability Lifeline cash benefit and housing services.

Hearing Date: 1/21/10

Staff: Linda Merelle (786-7092).

Background:

Access to Benefits.

Individuals are currently able to apply for and renew public assistance benefits online from their home and from kiosks located in the waiting areas in the offices of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The benefits available through this online service access application include food assistance, cash assistance, medical assistance, drug or alcohol treatment, assisted living, child care, and in-home care.

Since the summer of 2009, the DSHS has been working with a steering committee composed of nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and community organizations to develop a web-based benefits portal to allow eligible persons to apply for and access additional benefits such as energy assistance, federal student aid, housing assistance, and others. A request for proposals is being developed, and the steering committee is seeking private funding for the portal project.

Food Stamp Employment and Training Program.

The Food Stamp Employment and Training Program was established and administered through the Employment Security Department and the DSHS pursuant to a provision in the Washington Administrative Code. Recipients of assistance under the Basic Food Program, unless they are exempt, are required to participate in this program. Participants engage in job search workshops and receive assistance in job placement.

Emphasis in the program is given to participants who have been assessed as needing basic education, a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), English as a Second Language, or vocational training in order to increase their opportunity for employment. Currently 12 community colleges participate in this program.

General Assistance Program.

The General Assistance Program (General Assistance) is a public assistance program for low income individuals. Recipients are eligible for a cash grant, food assistance, and medical care, including mental health care. Individuals who are eligible for General Assistance are not eligible

for other federal assistance other than food assistance, and they are incapacitated from gainful employment because of a physical or mental infirmity that will likely continue for at least 90 days. If the infirmity is primarily due to a drug or alcohol addiction, a person is not eligible for General Assistance. The monthly cash grant amount for general assistance is \$339.

Summary of Bill:

Opportunity Portal.

A working group is created and must include the following entities:

- philanthropic organizations;
- community nonprofit organizations;
- the DSHS;
- the Department of Commerce;
- the State Board for Community Technical Colleges;
- the Department of Health;
- the Health Care Authority;
- the Employment Security Department; and
- representatives of local governments.

The working group may also include representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Senate Majority leader, and the Governor. The working group must convene its first meeting no later than April 1, 2010.

It must select an advanced software provider to integrate technology systems to create a web-based, on-line tool so that Washington residents may apply for a broad array of benefits, including, but not limited to, health care, higher education financial aid, tax credits, nutrition assistance, energy assistance, family assistance, and other benefits. The software must allow integration with Washington's information technology system. The selection of the software provider must be complete by August 2010.

The working group terminates January 1, 2015.

Funding

The working group must seek private funding for the development and initial operation of the Opportunity Portal. Incidental costs to state agencies are to be derived from existing resources. If private funding sufficient to implement and operate the Opportunity Portal is not secured by December 31, 2010, the section authorizing its implementation becomes null and void.

Reporting

The working group must submit an annual report to the Legislature and the Governor regarding implementation, outcomes, and use of the portal. The first report is due on December 1, 2011.

Expanding the Food Stamp and Training Program.

The DSHS, the Employment Security Department, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges must work in a partnership to expand the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program (Program). Subject to federal approval, the Program will be expanded to three additional community colleges in 2010 and will expand capacity of the 12 currently participating colleges.

The agencies working in partnership must seek out community organizations that can provide support services and case management to participants in the Program, and they must identify funds with which to draw down federal matching funds for employment and training services.

Employment and training funds are to be allocated for skill development for employment, vocational education, English as a second language, job readiness, tuition, housing, counseling, transportation, and other services.

Reporting

The DSHS must annually track and report outcomes, including federal funding received, the number of participants served, completion rates, wages, and other outcome-related data. The report must be submitted to the Governor and appropriate legislative committees on November 1 of each year, beginning 2010.

Disability Lifeline Program.

The General Assistance Program is renamed the "Disability Lifeline Program." All of the eligibility requirements and conditions that were in place for the General Assistance Program, including the cash benefit amount, remain in place.

There are additional provisions contained in the Disability Lifeline Program:

Disability Lifeline Expedited Program

The DSHS must review medical and other relevant evidence to determine whether a Disability Lifeline applicant is likely eligible for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. If there is any evidence of likelihood of eligibility for federal SSI benefits, the DSHS must move the recipient onto the Disability Lifeline Expedited Program no later than 90 days after initial eligibility is determined. Individuals identified through this process must be provided with assistance needed to obtain additional evidence of their disability and to successfully complete their application for SSI benefits.

Basic Health Plan Enrollment

Individuals who have lost eligibility for Disability Lifeline Program benefits due to improvements in their health status and who are eligible for subsidized basic health coverage must be given high priority for enrollment in the Basic Health Plan.

Access to Chemical Dependency Treatment

If the DSHS or an entity that has contracted with the DSHS to provide medical care services to Disability Lifeline Program clients determines that chemical dependency treatment is necessary to improve his or her health status for transition to employment or transition to federal disability benefits, the DSHS or the contracting entity must give the client high priority to enroll in chemical dependency treatment within funds appropriated for chemical dependency treatment. This requirement expires on June 30, 2013.

Permanent Housing Pilot Program

The DSHS, in conjunction with the entity that has contracted to provide medical care services to Disability Lifeline Program clients must establish a pilot program in no more than two counties for homeless persons eligible for Disability Lifeline Program benefits. Under the pilot program, the homeless persons will receive housing services and a reduced monthly stipend rather than the full Disability Lifeline Program cash benefit.

The DSHS must, by December 1 of each year, provide a brief update to the Legislature and the Governor on the status of the program. This requirement expires June 30, 2013.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 13, 2010.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately except section 6, relating to high priority for clients needing chemical dependency treatment in order improve health status, transition to employment, or to federal disability benefits, which takes effect July 1, 2010, however if funding to implement and operate the portal authorized under section 2 is not secured by December 31, 2010, section 2 is null and void.