

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5898

As Passed Senate, June 30, 2017

Title: An act relating to eligibility for public assistance programs.

Brief Description: Concerning eligibility for public assistance programs.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senator Braun).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 3/21/17, 3/22/17 [DPS, DNP].

Floor Activity:

Passed Senate: 3/23/17, 25-24.

Third Special Session: Passed Senate: 6/30/17, 49-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Suspends WorkFirst program work participation requirements for recipients who are a parent or other relative personally providing care for a child under the age of two.
- Extends a parent's eligibility for a good cause exemption for failure to participate in WorkFirst to 24 months.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5898 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Braun, Chair; Brown, Vice Chair; Rossi, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Vice Chair, Capital Budget ; Bailey, Becker, Fain, Miloscia, Padden, Rivers, Schoesler, Warnick and Zeiger.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Ranker, Ranking Minority Member; Rolfes, Assistant Ranking Minority Member, Operating Budget; Frockt, Assistant Ranking Minority Member, Capital Budget; Billig, Carlyle, Conway, Darneille, Hasegawa, Keiser and Pedersen.

Staff: Maria Hovde (786-7474)

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.

Background: Working Connections Child Care (WCCC). This federally- and state-funded program offers subsidies to childcare providers serving families with an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level—\$48,600 for a family of four. This program pays part of the cost of childcare when a parent is employed, self-employed, or meets the requirements for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or WorkFirst programs. Pursuant to enactment of ESSHB 1491 (2015), authorizations for WCCC are effective for 12 months.

Division of Child Support (DCS). The DCS, which is within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), is responsible for administering Washington's child support enforcement program. The DCS provides support enforcement services to parents receiving public assistance and to those non-assistance parents who request support enforcement services.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF is a federal block grant established under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The TANF program replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, which had provided grants to poor families with children since the 1930s.

States use TANF block grants to operate their own programs. State programs differ, but operate in accordance with the following purposes set forth in federal law:

- to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

WorkFirst. Washington State's TANF program is called WorkFirst and is administered by DSHS. Under the WorkFirst program, eligible adults receive various forms of assistance while they participate in activities that will help them connect to the workforce. WorkFirst participants are required to prepare an Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP) that describes in writing their responsibilities, the types of activities in which they are required to participate, and the services that will be received. Federal statutes require a certain participation rate for adults receiving TANF benefits, and states may be penalized if they fail to meet the required participation rate. WorkFirst participants may also be penalized in the form of reduced benefits or other sanctions for noncompliance. Federal statute defines both the activity as well as the length of time that a WorkFirst participant may spend on that activity. These definitions are also codified in state law. A work activity includes unsubsidized and subsidized paid employment, internships, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness assistance, vocational education training, education, and other activities.

Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) Program. The ABD cash assistance program provides a maximum monthly cash grant of \$197 to individuals who are aged 65 or older, blind, or have a long-term medical condition that is likely to meet federal disability criteria; meet income and resource requirements; meet citizenship/alien status requirements; and reside in

Washington State. Individuals may receive ABD assistance benefits pending application for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/WorkFirst. The requirements to prepare an IRP, to participate in work activities, and associated penalties for noncompliance are suspended for recipients who are a parent or other relative personally providing care for a child under the age of two.

The maximum total amount a parent is eligible for a good cause exemption for failure to participate in WorkFirst program components is extended to 24 months.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* CON: Many survivors of domestic violence rely on TANF. More than half of TANF recipients nationally have had experiences with domestic violence. Requiring a job search to be conducted prior to application would put domestic violence survivors at risk by imposing additional barriers to this important financial resource and drive otherwise eligible survivors away. In addition, requiring a job search before applying for TANF creates a barrier for individuals who are homeless. ABD helps older individuals who have experienced domestic violence as well and this is an important lifeline for them. Establishing a limit for ABD benefits is problematic because some applications can take longer than that timeline to be completed. The state is fully reimbursed when individuals successfully transition onto federal benefits. Imposing the time limit would mean that the state will forego federal reimbursement. We are also concerned that with the loss of this benefit individuals who are incapacitated and cannot work would lose a connection to disability services and support and this could result in decomposition of their physical and/or mental conditions.

Persons Testifying: CON: Pamela Crone, WA State Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Michael Althaus, Columbia Legal Services; Kate Baber, Washington Low Income Housing Alliance.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.