

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2809

As Passed House:
February 13, 2020

Title: An act relating to essential needs and housing support eligibility.

Brief Description: Regarding essential needs and housing support eligibility.

Sponsors: Representatives Caldier, Kilduff and Pollet; by request of Department of Social and Health Services.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 1/29/20, 2/8/20 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/20, 97-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends eligibility for referral to the Housing and Essential Needs program to individuals eligible for assistance through the Pregnant Women Assistance program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Robinson, 1st Vice Chair; Bergquist, 2nd Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Rude, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Chandler, Chopp, Cody, Dolan, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Hoff, Hudgins, Kilduff, Kraft, Macri, Mosbrucker, Pettigrew, Pollet, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Steele, Sullivan, Sutherland, Tarleton, Tharinger and Ybarra.

Staff: Jessica Van Horne (786-7288).

Background:

Pregnant Women Assistance Program.

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.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) administers the Pregnant Women Assistance (PWA) program. The PWA program provides state financial assistance to persons who are pregnant and in need according to the income and resource standards of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF), but are otherwise ineligible for TANF or other federal aid assistance.

Housing and Essential Needs Program.

The Department of Commerce (Commerce) administers the Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) program under the state's homeless housing program. The HEN program is funded with appropriations from the State General Fund in the biennial operating budget.

Commerce distributes funding to designated HEN providers within each county who provide housing supports or essential needs supports to eligible individuals. Housing supports are assistance provided to maintain existing housing when the recipient is at substantial risk of becoming homeless, to obtain housing, or to obtain certain utility services when the recipient is at risk of losing those services. Housing supports can include rental assistance. Essential needs supports can include items such as personal hygiene and household supplies, bus passes, and laundry tokens. Recipients of HEN supports do not receive a cash grant.

The DSHS determines the eligibility of individuals to receive housing or essential needs support through the HEN program. Eligible individuals must meet certain income standards; be temporarily unable to work for at least 90 days due to a physical or mental incapacity; and be ineligible for the PWA program, the TANF program, and other federal aid assistance. Recipients of Aged, Blind, or Disabled program benefits who meet other eligibility requirements are eligible for a referral to the HEN program.

The DSHS must share information with Commerce and designated HEN providers that allows for verification of an individual's HEN eligibility. Commerce must provide a list of individuals eligible for HEN supports to providers on no less than a monthly basis.

The income standards for HEN eligibility are set in statute. Countable income for an individual must be at or below \$339 per month, and income for married couples must be at or below \$428 per month.

Summary of Bill:

Persons eligible to be referred to the HEN program are expanded to include persons eligible for assistance through the PWA program. Recipients of PWA benefits who meet other HEN eligibility requirements are eligible for a referral to HEN for 24 consecutive months from the date the DSHS determines their eligibility for PWA assistance. The restriction that disqualifies an individual from HEN if they receive PWA benefits is removed.

The income standard for HEN eligibility is changed from a standard of at or below \$339 per month for individuals and at or below \$428 per month for married couples to a standard established by the DSHS.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill will support pregnant women who are struggling to access housing and essential needs and increase benefits and resources that individuals who qualify for the PWA program could receive. The current maximum monthly benefit for the PWA program is \$363, and the benefit ends when the individual is no longer pregnant. The current level of assistance provided through the PWA program does not meet an individual's foundational needs, especially if they have a child. Allowing PWA program recipients to access HEN for up to 24 consecutive months would allow them to receive benefits after they have given birth but still need assistance.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Caldier, prime sponsor; and David Stillman, Department of Social and Health Services.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.