

2SHB 2075 - H AMD 1021

By Representative Peterson

ADOPTED 02/15/2022

1 Strike everything after the enacting clause and insert the
2 following:

3 "NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that
4 establishing minimum service requirements for the department of
5 social and health services economic services administration's
6 community services division is necessary due to the increase in call
7 center wait times due to the closure of community services offices
8 during the COVID-19 public health emergency, resulting in individuals
9 being unable to access safety net programs administered by the
10 department.

11 (2) The legislature intends to establish minimum service
12 expectations and requirements to ensure that eligible individuals
13 receive needed services through the department's community services
14 offices. The legislature further intends to prohibit the department's
15 community services division from imposing punitive measures against
16 individuals when they have attempted to contact or access the
17 community services office, per requirements to apply for and maintain
18 their benefits, and are unable to connect due to long wait times over
19 the phone or due to closure of the community services offices, to the
20 extent allowable under federal and state law.

21 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 74.04
22 RCW to read as follows:

23 (1) Minimum service expectations and requirements for the
24 department's community services division are established.

25 (a) The community services division must ensure that clients may
26 apply for and receive services in a reasonable and accessible manner
27 that is suited to the clients' needs. This includes, but is not
28 limited to, meeting client needs related to technology, language, and
29 ability.

30 (b) Community services offices must be open for walk-in and in-
31 person services during normal business hours.

1 (i) The community services division may not limit which clients
2 are able to use walk-in and in-person services or limit which
3 services may be accessed in community services offices.

4 (ii) The department retains the right to close an office for
5 emergency, health, safety, and welfare issues.

6 (c) The community services division must maintain telephonic
7 access to services.

8 (i) The community services division must strive to ensure that
9 clients do not experience total call wait times that exceed 30
10 minutes.

11 (ii) The community services division must monitor the average
12 wait time for client telephone calls per week, and include a
13 measurement of all incoming calls, including dropped calls.

14 (iii) Beginning November 1, 2022, and annually thereafter, the
15 department must report to the appropriate committees of the
16 legislature and the governor in compliance with RCW 43.01.036 on the
17 average wait time for client telephone calls per week, the
18 measurement of all incoming calls, and the number of dropped calls,
19 and the methodology the department uses to monitor the total wait
20 times, the incoming calls, and the dropped calls.

21 (iv) By November 1, 2022, the department must provide to the
22 legislature recommendations on achieving the goal of 30-minute call
23 wait times, including recommendations on staffing, technology, and
24 any other infrastructure needed to efficiently serve clients.

25 (2) Where a cash and food assistance applicant or recipient is
26 negatively affected by excessive call wait times, dropped calls, or
27 community services division office closures during normal business
28 hours:

29 (a) The department must prioritize the processing of the
30 applicant's application to the extent allowed under state and federal
31 law; and

32 (b) The department may not take negative action to the extent
33 allowed under state and federal law.

34 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** If specific funding for the purposes of
35 this act, referencing this act by bill or chapter number, is not
36 provided by June 30, 2022, in the omnibus appropriations act, this
37 act is null and void."

38 Correct the title.

EFFECT: (1) Specifies that minimum service expectations and requirements are established for the Economic Services Administration's Community Services division of the Department of Social and Health Services, rather than referencing solely the Department of Social and Health Services (Department).

(2) Provides that community service offices must be open for walk-in and in-person services specifically during normal business hours.

(3) Removes the requirement that the Department restore a certain level of staffing for in-person services during a state of emergency, and instead provides that the Department retains the right to close an office for emergency, health, safety, and welfare issues.

(4) Sets a goal for the Community Services division to ensure that clients do not experience total call wait times that exceed 30 minutes, rather than requiring that average call wait times not exceed 30 minutes.

(5) In addition to requiring the Department to report to the Legislature and the Governor on the average wait time for client telephone calls per week, the measurement of all incoming calls, and the number of dropped calls, the Department must also report on the methodology the Department utilizes to monitor the total wait times, incoming calls, and the dropped calls.

(6) Requires the Department, by November 1, 2022, to provide to the Legislature recommendations on achieving the goal of 30-minute call wait times, including recommendations on staffing, technology, and any other infrastructure needed to efficiently serve clients.

(7) Provides that, where a cash and food assistance applicant or recipient is negatively affected by excessive call wait times, dropped calls, or Community Services Division office closures during normal business hours, the Department must prioritize the processing of the applicant's application and the Department must not take negative action, to the extent allowed under state and federal law.

(8) Removes language providing that if the Department fails to meet the minimum service requirements of the Act, benefit recipients may not be subject to punitive measures as it relates to their assistance.

(9) Removes language prohibiting the Department from terminating or sanctioning any client's benefits unless the community service office is fully open and operational to the public in the client's region.

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