

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## HB 1755

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As of February 17, 2022

**Title:** An act relating to temporary assistance for needy families time limit extensions during times of high unemployment.

**Brief Description:** Concerning temporary assistance for needy families time limit extensions during times of high unemployment.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Peterson, Leavitt, Bateman, Davis, Gregerson, Wylie, Sullivan, Simmons, Slatter, Bergquist, Pollet, Riccelli, Ormsby and Kloba; by request of Department of Social and Health Services.

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/12/22, 79-19.

**Committee Activity:** Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation: 2/17/22.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to allow a time limit extension to the five-year limit for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families when the most recently published state unemployment rate is 7 percent or higher.

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, REENTRY & REHABILITATION

**Staff:** Corban Nemeth (786-7736)

**Background:** Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was created under the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. TANF is a federal block grant providing temporary cash assistance, subsidized childcare, and work programs for families. 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:

- providing assistance to needy families so children may be cared for in their own

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- homes or in the homes of relatives;
- ending the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establishing annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

There is a federal life time limit of receiving TANF benefits for 60 months after July 27, 1997.

WorkFirst. WorkFirst is Washington State's TANF program which was initiated in 1997. The program has a number of requirements, many of which are federally required. For example, there is a federally imposed 60-month lifetime limit for receiving a cash grant TANF, unless the recipient qualifies for an exemption.

There are exceptions to the 60-month lifetime limit of receiving TANF benefits. Federal law limits hardship exemptions to 20 percent of the caseload. Current exemptions include:

- by reason of hardship, including when the recipient's family includes a child or youth who is without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as described in the federal McKinney-Vento homeless assistance act as it existed on January 1, 2020;
- if the family includes an individual who meets the family violence options of the federal social security act ; and
- beginning July 1, 2022, a recipient may receive a hardship time limit extension (TLE) equal to the number of months that the recipient received TANF during a month after March 2020 in which the unemployment rate was higher than 7 percent.

The extension must be equal to the number of months that the recipient received TANF and the required unemployment rate was met, and must be applied sequentially to any other hardship extension that may apply.

COVID-19 Policy Changes. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) adopted emergency rules to expand the TLE criteria to apply to families experiencing hardships during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Between April 1, 2020, and June 30, 2022, any resident of Washington who reaches or has reached the five-year limit is eligible for a hardship TLE.

**Summary of Bill:** Beginning July 1, 2022, DSHS must approve a hardship TLE when the state unemployment rate is 7 percent or higher, according to the rate most recently published by the Employment Security Department (ESD). DSHS may adopt rules specifying which published ESD rates to use for the unemployment hardship TLE.

**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:** PRO: This bill builds upon changes made by the Legislature last year. That change provided a TLE if a recipient had hit 60 months on or after March 1, 2020 and could retroactively bank months of benefits when unemployment was above percent. This bill improves upon that by using the most recent unemployment rates as there is a lag in time in getting the data. People should be able to get help with they need it. This helps people afford the bare minimum and helps over represented communities. Children make up over 70 percent of the caseload. You also have to be extremely low-income to qualify for TANF. Many policies were cut during the Great Recession for economic reasons. Just as families are recovering from that the pandemic hit. Twenty percent of the TANF caseload can be exempt from the 60-month lifetime limit, so this shouldn't be a problem.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Babs Roberts, Department of Social and Health Services ; Lianna Kressin, Statewide Poverty Action Network; Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition.

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