AN ACT Relating to establishing service requirements for the department of social and health services; adding a new section to chapter 74.04 RCW; and creating new sections.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(iv) By November 1, 2022, the department must 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.

(2) 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:

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

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

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

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