
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

HB 1263

Brief Description: Updating eligible uses for the essential needs and housing support program.

Sponsors: Representatives Cortes, Low, Peterson, Doglio, Street, Leavitt, Ryu, Davis, Obras, Reed, Goodman, Ormsby, Tharinger, Scott, Nance, Eslick, Kloba, Timmons, Pollet, Macri, Fey and Hill; by request of Department of Commerce.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Commerce to use Essential Needs and Housing program (HEN) funding to support low or extremely low-income elderly or disabled adults who are transitioning off HEN, are receiving federal Social Security disability benefits, and still have an immediate housing need.
- Allows benefits under the HEN program and programs funded through the Home Security Fund to be provided in the form of direct cash assistance.
- Requires the administration rate for HEN support entities to align with the rate for other programs funded through the Home Security Fund.

Hearing Date: 1/22/25

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

Essential Needs and Housing Program.

The Essential Needs and Housing (HEN) program provides funding to local governments and

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homeless service providers to help individuals referred to the program with time-limited rent assistance, services connected to housing stability, and limited essential needs items, such as personal hygiene and transportation. The Department of Social and Health Services determines eligibility for a referral to the HEN program. The HEN program is administered by the Department of Commerce.

Persons are eligible for a referral to the HEN program when they:

- have been determined to be eligible for the Pregnant Women's Assistance (PWA) program, the Aged, Blind, or Disabled program, or are incapacitated from gainful employment by reason of bodily or mental infirmity that will likely continue for a minimum of 90 days;
- are a citizen, a lawful permanent resident residing in the United States under color of law, or a victim of human trafficking, and have furnished a Social Security number, with some exceptions;
- have countable monthly income at or below \$428 for a married couple and \$339 for a single individual and meet certain resource limits, or meet income standards for the PWA program; and
- are not eligible for federal aid assistance other than basic food benefits and medical assistance.

Benefits provided under the HEN program cannot be provided to recipients in the form of cash assistance. No more than 7 percent of funds may be used by HEN support agencies for administrative expenses.

Housing Needs Pilot Program.

In 2020, funding was appropriated in the state operating budget for a pilot program to address the immediate housing needs of low or extremely low-income elderly or disabled adults receiving federal Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance, or Social Security Retirement Income benefits who had an immediate housing need and lived in King, Snohomish, Thurston, Kitsap, Pierce, or Clark counties. In the state operating budget's HEN program appropriation for the subsequent biennium, the Department of Commerce was given authorization to use a portion of the funds to continue the pilot program.

Home Security Fund.

A portion of county document recording surcharges are deposited into the Home Security Fund. The Department of Commerce uses moneys in the Home Security Fund to manage homelessness assistance grant programs providing services such as rental assistance, emergency housing and shelter support, and other housing-related assistance services.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Commerce may, in its discretion, use Essential Needs and Housing program (HEN) funds to support low or extremely low-income elderly or disabled adults who are transitioning off HEN program benefits, are receiving federal Social Security disability benefits, and still have an immediate housing need. A referral from the Department of Social and Health

Services is not required for these individuals.

Assistance through the HEN program and through Home Security Fund supported programs may be in the form of direct cash assistance.

The administrative rate for HEN support agencies must align with programs funded through the Home Security Fund.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 14, 2025

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