
Early Learning & Children's Services Committee

HB 3141

Brief Description: Redesigning the delivery of temporary assistance to needy families.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Pettigrew, Seaquist, Kenney and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Declares legislative intent to redesign the program of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).
- Requires that TANF funds appropriated by the Legislature to the Department of Social and Health Services are expended according to conditions defined by the Legislature.
- Establishes three pathways to self-sufficiency for TANF participants.
- Renames the WorkFirst Program to the Family Lifeline Program.
- Establishes a 12-month eligibility period for the Working Connections Child Care program.

Hearing Date: 1/29/10

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is administered with federal block grant funding, appropriated to the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) by the Legislature. Federal law permits the use of TANF funding for the following purposes:

- to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;

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- to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Washington's TANF program is called WorkFirst. Under WorkFirst, recipients receive a comprehensive evaluation prior to referral to job search activities. The evaluation is facilitated by a WorkFirst specialist and covers a broad range of topics. Information obtained through the evaluation process is used to develop an individual responsibility plan (IRP) for the recipient. The IRP includes an employment goal, a plan for obtaining employment as quickly as possible, and a description of services to remove barriers to employment and to enable the recipient to obtain and keep employment. Federal law requires states to include a job search component in their TANF programs. Washington's job search component calls for 12 weeks of job search and the focus of the program is work.

Federal TANF funding rules permit up to 30 percent of a state's TANF clients to be engaged in vocational education program of up to a year in length. Training and education programs are available through the state Community and Technical Colleges include the following:

- *Customized Job Skills Training*: short-term (8 - 22 weeks) employer-driven training to quickly develop skills for work.
- *High Wage/High Demand, Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST), and Vocational Education*: one-year certificate and degree programs targeting high-wage jobs in high-demand occupations. Assistance may be available to help cover tuition, books, and fees.
- *Work-Based Learning*: externships, clinical experiences, co-operative learning, and Work Study opportunities to provide authentic work experiences in conjunction with formal training designed to enhance employability and help parents secure higher wages at job entry.
- *Wage Progression*: job skills and education to increase skills and earning potential, including part-time vocational education courses.
- Other basic skills and employment-related training programs to address specific training gaps, including limited English and basic skill deficiencies. Training may focus on building job skills through improved English or literacy levels.

A household may receive TANF benefits for up to a lifetime maximum of 60 months, unless an adult qualifies for one of the following exemptions permitted by federal law:

- caregiver age 55 or older;
- caregiver for an adult who is disabled;
- caregiver for a child who is disabled or who has special needs;
- adult who is disabled and not eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance;
- adult in process of applying for Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income;
- adult addressing family violence issues; or
- adult caring for an infant under one year of age.

A household also may be exempt from the 60-month time limit on the basis of hardship. A state may exempt a total of up to 20 percent of its total TANF caseload.

Preliminary data from the current TANF caseload indicates that an estimated 5,000 households have been receiving TANF services for 61 or more months and are not eligible for an exemption on a basis other than hardship. Approximately 87 percent of these household are headed by a single adult. Of all the one adult households, over 90 percent are mothers who collectively are raising approximately 10,000 children, half of whom are under 8 years of age. An introductory analysis of educational levels of mothers in these single-adult households reflects that approximately 30 percent have less than a high school diploma and 40 percent have only a high school diploma.

Working Connections Child Care Program.

The Working Connections Child Care program (WCCC) provides child care subsidies to child care providers serving working families with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In addition to low-income working families, WCCC subsidies also may be paid to providers on behalf of:

- families receiving TANF who are enrolled in approved activities; and
- parents under age 22, not on TANF, and enrolled in high school or a General Education Development (GED) program.

The Economic Services Administration (ESA) within the DSHS has responsibility for verifying families' eligibility to receive WCCC subsidies. Under policies adopted by the Department of Early Learning (DEL), eligibility determinations for WCCC subsidies are effective for a period of three or six months, after which a reauthorization process is conducted to determine continued eligibility.

Changes that can result in a family becoming ineligible for subsidies include:

- an increase in income;
- the loss of a job or a temporary lay-off;
- not keeping current with the obligation to make the monthly co-payment to the provider;
- not providing notice of changes in the family's circumstances within the time frames required; or
- not providing all documentation requested at the time of the reauthorization.

Each time a parent loses eligibility for a WCCC subsidy, it may result in the child experiencing a change in caregiver and environment if, when eligibility is reinstated, the child's enrollment slot has already been filled by another child.

Summary of Bill:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

The primary focus of TANF is to be education and training opportunities that will lead to sustainable economic self-sufficiency for families. Three pathways to self-sufficiency are created to guide case management and engage parents in developing a comprehensive plan to achieve self-sufficiency while addressing families' current basic needs. The employment pathway is the presumptive referral for parents who are prepared to enter or re-enter the workforce and:

- have marketable job skills, adequate education, or experience and attachment to the job force;

- do not have unaddressed barriers to employment; and
- have transportation and safe child care arrangements in place.

Parents also may select the employment pathway even though eligible for another pathway. Persons entering the employment pathway must engage in job search activities for six weeks. If unsuccessful in obtaining employment, the career development pathway is the next presumptive referral.

The career development pathway is the presumptive pathway for persons who:

- have few or no marketable job skills and little experience or attachment to the job force;
- do not have a high school diploma or equivalent; or
- require adult basic education or barrier removal activities.

Persons entering the career development pathway must be referred to programs delivered or coordinated by the Community and Technical Colleges (CTCs) and to other activities to remove barriers to employment, as appropriate. The CTCs must coordinate all available resources to serve persons referred under this section, including but not limited to: opportunity grants; AmeriCorps programs; postsecondary technical education programs; apprenticeships; customized job training programs; and adult basic education and basic skills programs. Persons completing activities to remove barriers to employment may be referred to the employment pathway, if appropriate. Persons needing primarily entry-level work experience to progress in a career pathway leading to self-sufficiency may be referred to the community jobs program.

The disability support pathway is the presumptive pathway for persons who:

- are incapacitated and unemployable;
- are caring for a child with a disability; or
- are the primary caregiver for a family member with a disability.

Persons entering the disability support pathway who are exempt from active job search requirements due to incapacity or disability are eligible to receive benefits provided in Washington to persons with disabilities including, but not limited to:

- assistance applying for the federal social security disability and supplemental income programs;
- referral and access to chemical dependency treatment or mental health treatment, if appropriate; and
- referral to vocational rehabilitation, and other services needed to assist the recipient in becoming employable, if appropriate.

A definition of "hardship" is established and includes all federally-allowed exemptions and cases in which a parent is in compliance with his or her IRP and other circumstances deemed by the DSHS to be appropriate. At least three months prior to a family exiting the TANF program on the basis of reaching the 60-month limit, the DSHS must collaborate with the family and develop a transition plan identifying the resources and services the family will access to meet the basic needs of the children. A parent who is scheduled to leave after reaching the 60-month time limit and who has been unable to find stable employment, must be offered subsidized employment. If the parent accepts the offer, the parent is exempt from having benefits terminated on the basis of hardship.

Washington's TANF program is renamed the Family Lifeline Program. Expenditure of the TANF block grant funds appropriated by the Legislature to the DSHS are subject to conditions set forth by the Legislature in the operating budget.

Beginning December 1, 2010, the DSHS must report to the Legislature and the Governor and provide information on the number and characteristics of families who have left and who are about to leave the program due to ineligibility after reaching the 60-month time limit.

Working Connections Child Care Program.

Beginning in Fiscal Year 2011, for families with children enrolled in an Early Childhood Education Assistance Program or a Head Start program, the eligibility determination shall be valid for 12 months, unless. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2013, for all other families receiving WCCC subsidies, the same 12-month eligibility determination will take effect. Reauthorizations for WCCC eligibility will be conducted every 12 months unless the family reports a change in circumstances requiring a reauthorization sooner.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 26, 2010.

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