

HOUSE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2798

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to public assistance reform.

Brief Description: Making major changes to the welfare system.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Sommers, Thibaudeau, Cooke, Peery, Silver, Dorn, R. Meyers, Talcott, Valle, Carlson, Dunshee, Linville, Rust, Ballasiotes, Sehlin, Jacobsen, Foreman, Wolfe, Wineberry, Mastin, G. Fisher, Grant, Campbell, Brough, L. Thomas, B. Thomas, Lisk, McMorris, Chandler, Wood, Schoesler, Sheldon, Rayburn, Kremen, Brumsickle, Holm, Roland, Pruitt, Jones, Flemming, Horn, Kessler, Long, Shin, Moak, Finkbeiner, Quall, Conway, Springer, Tate, Mielke and Johanson).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Human Services, February 3, 1994, DPS;
Appropriations, February 7, 1994, DP2S;
Passed House, February 11, 1994, 97-0;
Senate amended;
House concurred
Passed Legislature, March 10, 1994, 95-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Leonard, Chair; Thibaudeau, Vice Chair; Cooke, Ranking Minority Member; Talcott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Brown; Caver; Karahalios; Patterson and Wolfe.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Lisk and Padden.

Staff: Dave Knutson (786-7146).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass. Signed by

26 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Valle, Vice Chair; Carlson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appelwick; Ballasiotes; Basich; Cooke; Dellwo; Dorn; Dunshee; G. Fisher; Foreman; Jacobsen; Lemmon; Leonard; Linville; H. Myers; Peery; Rust; Sehlin; Sheahan; Stevens; Talcott; Wang; Wineberry and Wolfe.

Staff: Beth Redfield (786-7130).

Background: Teen pregnancies, inadequate emphasis on job placement, and long term receipt of income assistance grants are barriers to achieving economic independence.

Summary of Bill: When people apply for, or are reassessed through the Aid To Families With Dependent Children Program, they will receive family planning information and assistance from the Department of Social and Health Services or a contracted agency. The Department of Social and Health Services will train financial and social work staff to communicate the transitional nature of aid to families with dependent children; actively refer people to the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program; provide family planning information and assistance, in consultation with the Department of Health. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction will provide grants to school districts for media campaigns that encourage individuals to delay sexual activity, pregnancy, and childbearing until they are prepared to support their children and that encourages sexual abstinence before marriage. Community public health and safety networks may also fund student designed media and community campaigns promoting sexual abstinence and delaying sexual activity and pregnancy or male parenting. The department will aggressively seek to maximize federal funds for the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program. The department will incorporate job development into local welfare office activities.

The Jobs Opportunity and Basic Skills Program is changed from a voluntary to a mandatory program. Within the federal requirements for participation, the following groups are established as priorities: (1) parents under age 24 with little or no work experience; (2) parents under age 24 without a high school or GED degree; (3) recipients who have received assistance for 36 of the preceding 60 months; (4) one parent in a two parent household on assistance will participate in a work related activity at least 16 hours per week. Recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children may volunteer in child care facilities and other volunteer organizations if they are not participating in an education or work training program. Recipients of assistance for 48 of the prior 60 months will have their grant payment reduced by 10 percent, and an additional 10 percent for each

additional year they receive assistance. Exemptions are available if the recipient meets specific good cause exemptions. The recipient may earn income to make up for the grant reduction, and the earned income will not result in a dollar for dollar reduction in the person's grant payment. Recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children who are under the age of 18 are presumed ineligible for assistance unless they live in one of four authorized living situations. The department is required to eliminate the 100 hour rule for two parent families on public assistance.

Support enforcement will attempt to determine the identity of the noncustodial parent at the time of child's birth. The Office of Support Enforcement will notify consumer reporting agencies of all child support obligations. It will also contract with collection agencies to collect arrearages which cause a disproportionate share of the office's collection efforts. When a negotiable instrument, such as a check, is received by the Office of Support Enforcement and is returned for insufficient funds, restitution will be sought from the payer of the child support order.

The Department of Health will submit an immunization assessment and enhancement proposal to reduce vaccine-preventable diseases among Washington's children. The Legislative Budget Committee will conduct a program performance audit of the Department of Health's immunization program.

The Department of Social and Health Services will determine the most appropriate living situation for applicants under the age of 18. Parents of the recipient are entitled to a hearing in superior court to challenge a decision by the department related to the most appropriate living situation for their child.

The state food donation act is modified by the addition of language from the model federal good samaritan food donation act.

A voluntary wage supplementation program is established in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to supplement wages paid by private employers to Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients. Local Employment Partnership Councils pilot this program, through job development and matching job seekers with employers. DSHS contracts with local public or private nonprofit organizations.

Recipients are paid a minimum of \$5 per hour and receive benefits equal to other employees. Training wages can be paid, if allowable under federal wage and hour law. Unspecified incentives are created to encourage employers to retain the workers for more than six months. Limitations on the types of positions for which the AFDC recipients would be allowed to qualify are already in current statute.

The program is aimed at the "hardest to employ" and those "at-risk of long-term dependence on welfare."

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Sections 6, 7, and 11 of the bill take effect July 1, 1994. Sections 12 and 13 take effect July 1, 1996. The remainder of the bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (Human Services) Incentives for teenagers to go on welfare should be removed, long term recipients of public assistance should have their grants reduced as an incentive to work.

(Appropriations) Recipients have a work ethic, they just need opportunity. Education is very important in enabling recipients to get off public assistance and stay off. We need to be supportive of culture change at the Department of Social and Health Services, to have more coordination between Income Assistance and Children and Family Services, and involve recipients in developing their independence plan. The exemption from JOBS participation if caring for a child age three or less is consistent with federal law and more realistic given cost and availability of infant day care.

Testimony Against: (Human Services) Punitive measures against poor people should not be increased.

(Appropriations) If a recipient takes any job offered, she will be back on welfare soon. This recycling will cost more in the long run. The Superintendent of Public Instruction program of student-produced media campaigns excludes abortion alternatives or abstinence-based programs. The adult living situation required of minor recipients could include a boyfriend. This situation should be approved by a parent.

Witnesses: (Human Services) Representative Ebersole, Speaker of the House (pro); and Representative Sommers (pro); Liz Schott, Evergreen Legal Services (con); Dayna Micone (con); Cheryl Sabin (con); Ned Dolejsi, Washington State Catholic Conference (con); Barbara Pool (pro); Valera

Fetterman (pro); Kathy Morefield, Fair Budget Action Campaign (con).

(Appropriations) (In favor) Barb McGinn and Valera Fetterman, private citizens; Kathy Morefield, Fair Budget Action Campaign; Laurie Lippold, The Children's Alliance; Lonnie Johns-Brown, NOW/NASW; (opposed) and Priscilla Martens, The Capitol Project.