

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2900

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to pro rata calculation of temporary assistance for needy families grants.

Brief Description: Providing for pro rata calculation of temporary assistance for needy families grants.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Children & Family Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Cooke, Ballasiotes, McDonald, Boldt and Mitchell).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/27/98, 1/30/98 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/7/98 [DPS(CFS)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/98, 95-1.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Cooke, Chairman; Boldt, Vice Chairman; Bush, Vice Chairman; Ballasiotes; Carrell and McDonald.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Tokuda, Ranking Minority Member; Kastama, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson; Gombosky and Wolfe.

Staff: Douglas Ruth (786-7134).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Children & Family Services be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Huff, Chairman; Alexander, Vice Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; Wensman, Vice Chairman; Benson; Carlson; Cooke; Crouse; Lambert; Lisk; Mastin; McMorris; Parlette; D. Schmidt; Sehlin; Sheahan and Talcott.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 12 members: Representatives H. Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Doumit, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gombosky, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chopp; Cody; Grant; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler; Poulsen; Regala and Tokuda.

Staff: Joe Hauth (786-7271).

Background: In the 1997 session, the Legislature created the WorkFirst program. The program is intended to assist recipients of TANF to move from public assistance to unsubsidized employment. In conformity with the federal welfare law that created the TANF block grant, participants in the program are required to perform work activities as a condition of receiving assistance. A specified number of hours of work are required to be completed by each recipient each month.

If a recipient refuses to perform the required hours of work in a month, the department may impose a sanction. The penalty for failing to meet the work requirement is reduction of the family's grant by the recipient's share in the first instance, reduction of the grant and assignment of a protective payee in the second instance, and a 40 percent reduction in the third instance. Finally, the department has the option to terminate the grant altogether. These sanctions are subject to good cause exceptions.

The federal welfare law also gives the states the option of using a "pro rata" sanction. This sanction reduces the recipient's grant by the percentage of the work requirement he or she did not fulfill during the month.

Summary of Bill: The department is required to study the adoption of a pro rata method for calculating grants. The study must consider the feasibility of adopting the pro rata method, the fiscal impact of such an adoption, appropriate good cause exceptions, rules for preventing abuse of the good cause exceptions, and recommendations for alternative calculation methods. The department will report its findings to the appropriate committees of the House and Senate by November 30, 1998.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (Children & Family Services) None.

(Appropriations) This bill adopts a reasonable approach for determining the appropriate grant amount. People in this program are preparing themselves for work. If they don't show up, they won't receive the grant. The pro rata approach is already being used successfully by state agencies in other service programs

Testimony Against: (Children & Family Services) The current policy of imposing progressive sanctions sends a clear message to participants that failure to work has consequences. It is also a straightforward and clear policy. In comparison, the pro rata method of sanctioning is complicated. The Department of Social and Health Services will need to recalculate grant amounts each time a participant fails to meet the work requirement. This will necessitate close tracking of each participant's hours. Case managers will be spending more time tracking hours and recalculating grants than focusing on getting participants into a work position. In addition, different categories of participants are required to work a different number of hours. This further complicates a pro rata process. Good cause exemptions are needed. Illness or transportation problems may prevent a participant from working. A family should not suffer for these unforeseeable occurrences.

(Appropriations) None.

Testified: (Children & Family Services) Randi Abrams, Jewish Federation (concerns).

(Appropriations) Representative Cooke, prime sponsor.