

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5497

As of February 14, 1997

Title: An act relating to public assistance.

Brief Description: Encouraging shared housing arrangements for recipients of temporary assistance for needy families.

Sponsors: Senators Hochstatter, Schow and Oke.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/18/97.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Joanne Conrad (786-7472)

Background: Under prior welfare law, recipients qualified for cash assistance based upon income, assets and family size. The amount of the cash grant did not vary due to housing arrangements. Under federal welfare reform, in the process of being implemented in Washington State, benefits are conditional. Requirements and time limits are imposed, but housing arrangements are not addressed.

Studies exist that claim there is a connection between intact family status and socioeconomic well-being. According to these studies, two-parent families have greater success in raising healthy, educated children. Lack of family stability is considered by some to be a risk factor for children.

Summary of Bill: Intent is stated to promote stable family life, marriage, and positive relationships. Benefits are structured to encourage families on assistance to share housing arrangements and living expenses. Families that voluntarily agree to share housing receive 100 percent of their cash grant for a specified time. Families that choose to live separately receive 50 percent of their grant. No more than six individuals may share housing.

In all cases, cash assistance is time-limited. Families receive cash assistance for 27 months, after which they are ineligible for 213 months. At various points in time, the amount of the grant is decreased by 25 percent each quarter.

Recipients are allowed to retain 75 percent of their unsubsidized earned income, without losing eligibility.

Recipients who marry, leave assistance, and stay married for at least 12 months, receive a bonus equal to four times their monthly benefit amount.

Non-citizens are ineligible for public benefits, including financial grants, medical assistance, food stamps, child nutrition services, and the women, infants and children (WIC) program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 14, 1997.

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