

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5924

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Ways & Means, April 2, 1997

Title: An act relating to general assistance.

Brief Description: Conditioning general assistance eligibility for persons with drug or alcohol addiction on attendance at a certified drug and alcohol treatment program.

Sponsors: Senators West and Oke.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 3/27/97, 4/2/97 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5924 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators West, Chair; Deccio, Vice Chair; Strannigan, Vice Chair; Brown, Fraser, Hochstatter, Kohl, Long, Loveland, McDonald, Rossi, Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel, Swecker, Thibaudeau and Winsley.

Staff: Susan Lucas (786-7711)

Background: The General Assistance-Unemployable program (GA-U) provides cash assistance and limited medical services for individuals who are disabled for more than 90 days by a physical or mental impairment. Recipients who are permanently and totally disabled are referred to a caseworker who assists them in obtaining federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits under a program of SSI facilitation. Recipients must show a clear improvement in their disabling condition in order to be removed from the GA-U caseload. The program is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration.

In 1996, the federal government passed P.L. 104-121. The law changes eligibility for SSI so that any person who has chemical dependency as a contributing factor to their disability is no longer eligible for SSI. These persons are being reexamined for eligibility purposes beginning January 1, 1997. It is estimated that approximately 4,700 recipients will lose their SSI eligibility under P.L. 104-121. Of these, approximately 3,200 will be eligible for GA-U and the remainder will be eligible to access state chemical dependency treatment funding.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Persons who have been determined eligible for GA-U and who are chemically dependent are subject to certain requirements in order to continue their eligibility. Requirements for these persons are that they must be enrolled in an approved treatment program, that they must be assigned to a protective payee and that they must cooperate with the department in attending assigned treatment programs in order to retain eligibility for benefits. Recipients subject to these requirements receive benefits while they

are waiting for a treatment program slot to become available and do not lose their eligibility for benefits if they cooperate with the department in attending treatment but are unable to end their chemical dependency. These recipients may be subject to periodic drug testing as determined by the department.

The Department of Social and Health Services must provide facilitation services to those recipients who are not longer chemically dependent and may be eligible for federal SSI benefits.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill was not considered.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on April 1, 1997.

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

Testimony: The bill will cost local governments money when recipients lose GA-U benefits. Local human services and health care systems will be asked to pick up these recipients. Most of these recipients have mental health as well as chemical dependency issues and won't make it through treatment successfully the first time.

Testified: Cheryl Chow, city of Seattle; Reverend Thomas Quigley, Church Council of Greater Seattle; Jamie Rogers, Sacred Heart Hospital of Spokane; Vicky Meijlander, Therapeutic Health Services; Linda Grant, Association of Alcoholism Addiction Programs.