

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2546

As Reported By House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to establishing performance measures and the setting of goals for earnings gains, job retention, and access to benefits that support work for the WorkFirst program.

Brief Description: Establishing WorkFirst performance measures.

Sponsors: Representatives Tokuda, D. Sommers, Rockefeller, Boldt, Veloria, Ballasiotes, Kenney, Radcliff, Lovick, Linville, Regala, Dickerson, McIntire, Grant, Santos, Carlson, Cody, Ogden, Anderson, Mitchell, Conway, Schual-Berke, Lantz, Edmonds, Ruderman, Wolfe, Keiser, Stensen, Haigh, Dunn, Wood, O'Brien, Kagi, Hurst and Kessler.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/26/00, 2/3/00 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires reporting on earnings gains, and an annual report on the percentage of people returning to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or receiving unemployment compensation.
- The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is instructed to undertake certain steps to inform recipients about work support benefits. An annual report of data about these benefits is required.
- DSHS is required to convene a work group to develop customer service standards, and report on performance related to the standards.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Tokuda, Democratic Co-Chair; Kagi, Democratic Vice Chair; Campbell; Carrell; Dickerson; Eickmeyer; Kastama and Pflug.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives D. Sommers, Republican Co-Chair and Boldt, Republican Vice Chair.

Staff: Deborah Frazier (786-7152).

Background:

The 1997 act creating the WorkFirst program (Engrossed House Bill 3901) requires earnings and job retention outcome measures. The Governor's WorkFirst performance report currently includes the following performance measures: 50 percent of WorkFirst clients will increase their earnings by 10 percent within one year of leaving TANF; and 60 percent of WorkFirst clients will earn at least \$2,500 per quarter for four consecutive quarters after leaving TANF for work.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The substitute bill requires reporting on earnings gains, and an annual report on the percentage of people returning to TANF or receiving unemployment compensation. The DSHS is instructed to undertake certain steps to inform recipients about work support benefits. An annual report of data about these benefits is required. The DSHS is required to convene a work group to develop customer service standards and report on performance related to the standards.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill established goals and defined performance measures for: earnings and wage progression; job retention; access to work support benefits; and customer service standards. Calculation methodologies and reporting requirements were specified.

The substitute bill deletes the goals and calculation methodologies for wage progression and job retention. Earnings gains reporting is simplified. An annual report on the percentage of people returning to TANF or receiving unemployment compensation is added.

The substitute bill deletes goals for work support benefits. The DSHS is instructed to undertake certain steps to inform recipients about work support benefits. The reporting frequency for data about these benefits is changed from quarterly to annually.

The substitute bill retains the required development of customer service standards, and reporting on performance related to the standards.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The provisions of this bill will improve the WorkFirst program by measuring its performance in key areas. It will enable policy makers to assess the effectiveness of the program, and will improve families' access to work support benefits. The customer service standards will help improve the performance of the local community services offices.

Testimony Against: Putting these measures into law means that changing measures that prove to be measuring the wrong thing, or that prove to have set inappropriate targets, is a slow and difficult process. It would be preferable to set desired outcomes in statute, which is the case with current law, and administratively determine what to measure about progress toward these outcomes.

Testified: (In support) Representative Kip Tokuda, prime sponsor; Jon Gould, Children's Alliance; and Shelley Miller, Eatonville Childcare and Preschool, Inc.

(Concerns) Ken Miller, Office of Financial Management.