

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5625

As Passed Senate, March 17, 1999

Title: An act relating to work requirements under the temporary assistance for needy families program.

Brief Description: Changing work requirement provisions for the temporary assistance for needy families program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Labor & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl-Welles, Fairley, Winsley, Brown, Thibaudeau, Kline, Patterson, Fraser, Franklin, Gardner, Rasmussen, B. Sheldon, Snyder and Horn).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Labor & Workforce Development: 2/9/99, 3/2/99 [DPS, DNPS].
Ways & Means: 3/8/99 [DPS (LWD)].
Passed Senate, 3/17/99, 28-19.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5625 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Franklin, Vice Chair; Kline and Wojahn.

Minority Report: Do not pass substitute.

Signed by Senator Hochstatter.

Staff: Joanne Conrad (786-7472)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5625 as recommended by Committee on Labor & Workforce Development be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Loveland, Chair; Bauer, Vice Chair; Brown, Vice Chair; Fairley, Fraser, Kline, Kohl-Welles, Rasmussen, B. Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel, Thibaudeau, Winsley and Wojahn.

Minority Report: Do not pass substitute.

Signed by Senators Honeyford, McDonald, Rossi and Zarelli.

Staff: Brian Sims (786-7431)

Background: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a time-limited approach to welfare reform. Under federal and state law, qualified families may generally receive up to 60 months of TANF grant assistance. After that time, they lose their cash grant, although

they may still qualify for other forms of low income assistance, such as food stamps or subsidized child care.

In addition, TANF recipients are generally required to participate in various TANF WorkFirst activities, which can include paid employment, training or community service.

Concerns exist regarding the appropriateness of requiring certain categories of TANF recipients to participate in the required work activities. These categories include grandparents caring for children on welfare, victims of domestic violence, and incapacitated persons, among others.

Exemptions from time limits or work activities for these categories do not exist under current law. Washington State's Welfare Reform Act will not exempt anyone from the 60-month time limit until they have received 52 months of TANF assistance, and will exempt from WorkFirst activities only under narrow circumstances, such as when caring for an infant under the age of one, or when child care is unavailable.

Summary of Bill: Additional good cause for failure to participate in TANF WorkFirst program components includes: being the victim of domestic violence, being incapacitated or caring for an incapacitated child, or being a nonparent relative age 55 or older and caring for a child on welfare. Domestic violence victims and those with incapacities, or caring for an incapacitated child, provide documentation in order to qualify for the good cause exemption. Work requirements are deferred for persons in these categories, and months on TANF are not counted towards the 60-month limit. Termination of the deferral occurs when the condition upon which it is based no longer exists.

Exemptions or deferrals are capped at 20 percent of TANF caseload. The requirement to refrain from deferring a client until 52 months on caseload is removed. DSHS facilitates placement of TANF recipients into work activities involving apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship training.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: It is inappropriate to require grandparents and disabled persons to perform WorkFirst work activities. They should be deferred. Child care for children with developmental disabilities is prohibitively expensive. Many other states have similar deferrals.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Senator Kohl-Welles, prime sponsor; Sara Fleming, WA Assn. of Churches; Tory Henderson, DD Council; Monica Peabody, Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition; Liz Dunbar, DSHS (concerns); Lonnie Johns-Brown, National Association of Social Workers.