

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1144

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Children & Family Services

**Title:** An act relating to the WorkFirst program participation exemption.

**Brief Description:** Modifying good cause reasons for failure to participate in the WorkFirst program.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Kessler, Tokuda, Ogden, Keiser, Cody, Santos, Edmonds, Kenney, Linville, Darneille, O'Brien, Ruderman, Rockefeller, Dickerson, McDermott, Edwards, Conway, Schual-Berke, Jackley, Lovick, McIntire and Haigh.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Children & Family Services: 2/6/02 [DP].

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Brief Summary of Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Allows parents with a child under the age of one year a "good cause" exemption from the Workfirst program.</li></ul>
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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Tokuda, Chair; Kagi, Vice Chair; Darneille, Dickerson and Miloscia.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Boldt, Ranking Minority Member; Morell, Nixon and Orcutt.

**Staff:** Tracey Taylor (786-7196).

**Background:**

In 1996 the federal government enacted welfare reform. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 shifted the emphasis of the federal program to a "Work First" approach. This approach is characterized by the idea that holding down a job and earning a paycheck is the best way for families to support themselves and leave poverty and government assistance behind. In 1997 Washington enacted its version

of welfare reform.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides cash grants, employment skills training, child care and other services for eligible families. A family that includes an adult can receive TANF benefits for a maximum of 60 months during his or her lifetime.

Participants are required to participate in Workfirst activities, including job skills and work related activities. A participant must have "good cause" in failing to participate or he or she is subject to sanctions. "Good cause" includes a parent or other relative personally caring for a child under six years who requires formal or informal child care in order to participate in Workfirst, but the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) fails to provide such care. Until June 30, 1999, if the parent had a child under the age of one year, the parent was excused from participating for up to a total of 12 months. After June 30, 1999, the parent was excused from participating if the parent had a child under three months of age.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The TANF recipients with a child under the age of one year are exempted from participation in Workfirst activities for up to a total of 12 months.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Testimony For:** Allowing a good cause exemption for a parent to stay home with a child under the age of 12 months makes good fiscal and social policy. Ages birth to three years of age is a critical learning and development time for a child. Proper development is based on love, security and care and the bonding with a permanent care giver. It is the optimal situation for a parent to be available to provide the daily care for a child. At the same time, there is a scarcity of available infant child care placements, especially with a licensed provider. It is even more difficult to get any child care for a swing shift or weekend. The TANF recipients are often challenged by a lack of a family support system, an unstable job market and a difficult work schedule. These barriers coupled with the benefits to the infant's development make the good cause exemption a positive policy change. Finally, the changes do not prohibit the DSHS from offering services, including preemployment training, to a parent exercising this exemption or a parent from taking advantage of various department programs.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** Representative Kessler, prime sponsor; Agda Burchard, Washington Association of Education of Young Children; Susan Kavanaugh, Child Care Action Council; Kristen Rogers, Children's Alliance; Donna Christensen, Washington State Catholic Conference; and Phyllis Lowe, Department of Social and Health Services.