
**Children & Family Services
Committee**

HB 1372

Brief Description: *Creating the higher education for lifelong progress program.*

Sponsors: *Representatives Kenney, Cox, Dunn, Jarrett, Kessler, Tokuda, Fromhold, Skinner, Ruderman, Santos, Gombosky, Lantz and Wood.*

Brief Summary of Bill

- *Establishes the Higher Education for Lifelong Progress (HELP) program to help college qualified parents eligible for TANF to receive up to 2 years of undergraduate education or training.*
- *A study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy will conduct an outcome study of program participants, with reports delivered annually.*

Hearing Date: *2/8/01*

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

Background:

In 1996, the federal government enacted welfare reform. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) shifted the emphasis of the federal program to a Work First- approach.

To avoid financial penalties, states must each year place an increasing proportion of their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload in work activities as prescribed by the statute. This year (FFY 01) 45 percent of all families must meet their individual requirements. Currently, most TANF recipients participate in a work activity for an average of 30 hours per week.

Some educational programs may be considered work activities that count as participation under the PRWORA. Such programs include job skills training, vocational educational training and education directly related to employment. Non-vocational post-secondary

education is not an approved activity under PRWORA. However, students can still be counted toward the state work requirement as long as they are also completing the required number of hours on approved activities. If a state has a sufficient number of TANF recipients participating in work activities, there is no barrier to the creation of a post-secondary program. Moreover, states are not prohibited from using their TANF funds on non-vocational post-secondary education, so long as it serves the goal of the TANF program.

Summary of Bill:

This bill establishes the Higher Education for Lifelong Progress (HELP) program to help college-qualified parents eligible for TANF receive up to 2 years of undergraduate education or training. The HELP program will be countable as a work activity–required for TANF participants. No additional work activity requirements may be imposed.

The department must inform all TANF applicants and participants of their option to apply for the HELP program as well as the criteria for acceptance. To participate, a TANF recipient must be accepted into a postsecondary program; must be enrolled full-time, with the expectation that they make satisfactory progress (a minimum 2.5 GPA) towards a degree, certificate or license in a field with high probability of employment and wage progression; and meet the requirements for the state need grant. In addition, the participants should be enrolled in a program that is likely to result in employment that provides a living wage– and discontinue his or her reliance on TANF.

The participants may receive TANF cash grants; medical assistance; Working Connections child care; food stamps; tuition assistance (actual tuition or public tuition rate, whichever is less); other support services; and facilitated access to Pell grants and state need grants. The participants should also receive career counseling and planning services.

To the extent allowed by federal law, all assistance received under the HELP program shall not count as income and be excluded as a resource or asset for the purposes of TANF eligibility.

A study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy shall conduct an outcome study of program participants, with reports delivered annually. At a minimum, the study should track the degree completion, wage progression, dropout rate and projected increase of lifetime earnings.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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