
**Children & Family Services
Committee**

HB 2656

Brief Description: Modifying exemptions of temporary assistance for needy families.

Sponsors: Representatives Boldt, Mielke, Clements and Morell.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Defines the hardship exemption to the 60 month TANF time limit as including only recipients that are physically or mentally incapacitated, recipients caring for a physically or mentally incapacitated family members, and recipients who meet the definition of a battered woman.

Hearing Date: 2/6/02

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. 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) began in 1997. The 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. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) can exempt a recipient and the recipient's family from the 60 month time limit by reason of hardship or if the family includes a battered woman. Under federal law, the number of recipients and families exempted from the time limit requirement cannot exceed 20% of the average monthly TANF caseload of the state. It is estimated that Washington can exempt up to 11,000 cases.

The first families in Washington state will be reaching their time limit in August 2002. In November 2001, the Governor announced a time limit extension for certain TANF recipients:

- Persons with physical or mental disabilities so chronic and severe that they cannot be expected to work, primary caregivers of a disabled child or relative, and older adults caring for related children.
- Parents receiving TANF who are fully participating in the WorkFirst requirements. These extensions will be temporary and periodically reviewed.
- Persons who refuse to participate. The parents in this category will lose their TANF grant, but a new Child-SafetyNet payments program managed by a third party will be provided to ensure children in these households continue to have their basic needs met. The payment will be 60% of the family's TANF grant amount and protective payees will use that money to pay for rent, utilities and other items necessary to support the children.

Summary of Bill:

The hardship exemption is narrowed to include only those recipients who are physically or mentally incapacitated and as a result cannot meet the participation requirements of WorkFirst, those recipients caring for a physically or mentally incapacitated family member and recipients who meet the definition of a battered woman.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 1/29/02.

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