

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1144

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, February 27, 2002

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: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by 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: Human Services & Corrections: 2/21/02, 2/27/02 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Costa, Vice Chair; Carlson, Franklin, Hewitt, Kastama, Kohl-Welles, Long and Stevens.

Staff: Edith Rice (786-7444)

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.

Summary of Bill: The TANF recipients with a child under the age of one year are exempt from participation in Workfirst activities for up to a total of 12 months. This exemption is available for only one time and for one child. Once the infant reaches three months of age, parents exercising this exemption are required to participate for up to 20 hours per week in parenting classes, preemployment or job-readiness training, or course study leading to a high school diploma or GED. He or she may also volunteer at a licensed child care facility. A parent can choose to participate fully in the WorkFirst program.

Within available resources, the DSHS must conduct an assessment of a parent using this exemption within 90 days to identify any specific service needs or barriers to employment. The assessment may include identifying the need for substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment or domestic violence services. Information obtained through the assessment is used in developing the parent's individual responsibility plan.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Please note support.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Paul Barry, Children's Alliance; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.