
**Children & Family Services
Committee**

ESSB 6559

Brief Description: Revising temporary assistance for needy families.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Children & Family Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Stevens and Hargrove).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Requires WorkFirst recipients to participate in job search for 30 days before receiving cash benefits.
- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to sanction WorkFirst recipients who have received assistance for 60 months and have refused to engage in required work and work activities.
- Establishes a sanction of a reduction of cash benefits by 40 percent and mandatory designation of a protective payee for WorkFirst recipients refusing to engage in required work and work activities.

Hearing Date: 2/25/04

Staff: Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

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. In 1997, Washington enacted its version of welfare reform, establishing the WorkFirst program.

Each WorkFirst recipient must be assessed after determination of program eligibility and before referral to job search, which consists of instruction on how to secure a job and assisted job search activities to locate and retain employment. Assessments must be based upon factors that are critical to obtaining employment, including, but not limited to, education, availability of child care, history of family violence, history of substance abuse, and other factors that affect the ability to obtain employment.

If a WorkFirst recipient refuses to engage in required work and work activities, the family's grant must be reduced by the recipient's share, and may, if the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) determines it appropriate, be terminated. The DSHS may waive these penalties if the recipient refused to engage in work for good cause.

Summary of Bill:

If the required assessment of a WorkFirst recipient indicates that the recipient is able to engage in job search, the recipient must participate in job search for 30 days before receiving cash benefits. If the recipient has been aggressively participating in a local job search prior to application, by making at least three job contacts each day or 15 job contacts each week as documented by providing copies of completed job applications or verification of job interviews, all or a portion of the 30-day waiting period must be waived.

In cases in which a WorkFirst recipient refuses to engage in required work and work activities, it is no longer provided that the family's grant must be reduced by the recipient's share and may be terminated, without good cause.

It is provided that the DSHS is required to sanction a WorkFirst recipient who has received assistance for 60 months and has refused to engage in required work and work activities, without good cause.

If a recipient has refused to engage in required work and work activities, without good cause, the sanction must be a reduction of cash benefits by 40 percent and mandatory designation of a protective payee. A protective payee is a person or an employee of an agency who manages client cash benefits to provide for basic needs such as housing, utilities, clothing, child care, and food.

Before cash benefits are reduced by 40 percent and sent to a protective payee, the DSHS is required to conduct a case staffing to determine whether the recipient has good cause for nonparticipation as provided in state law. The recipient and the recipient's chosen representative must be allowed to attend this case staffing. The cash benefit must be restored and protective payee discontinued the first of the following month after the recipient resumes full and active participation as required for 12 full consecutive weeks.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 17, 2004.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.