

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6559

As Passed Senate, February 16, 2004

Title: An act relating to provision of cash grants, case staffing, and work requirements to families eligible for temporary assistance for needy families.

Brief Description: Revising temporary assistance for needy families.

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

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Children & Family Services & Corrections: 1/30/04, 2/4/04 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 2/16/04, 29-18.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6559 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Stevens, Chair; Parlette, Vice Chair; Carlson, Deccio, Hargrove, McAuliffe and Regala.

Staff: Edith Rice (786-7444)

Background: A lifetime limit of 60 months on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Washington's WorkFirst program is recognized in both federal and state law. Exemptions from this limit can be granted for good cause. Eligible recipients can receive cash benefits right away. If a recipient fails to participate in the required activities, the family's cash benefit can be reduced. If the recipient has reached the 60 month time limit and is not participating in the required activities without good cause, the cash benefit can be reduced and sent to a third party (protective) payee who assures that the funds are used to meet the basic needs of children in the family.

Summary of Bill: Work First is a time-limited transitional assistance program to help recipients gain paid employment. Eligible recipients who are assessed ready to look for work must do so for 30 days before they receive a cash benefit. If the recipient has been aggressively seeking employment locally, the 30-day waiting period is waived.

Recipients who refuse to work for six months without good cause will have their benefits reduced by 40 percent and sent to a protective payee. The full grant can be restored and protective payee status discontinued when the recipient resumes and maintains full participation in job activities for 12 full weeks. However, before this happens the department conducts a case staffing to determine what barriers may remain to engaging in work.

Recipients who reach their 60-month limit and are not engaged in work activities without good cause will have their benefits reduced by 40 percent and sent to a protective payee. The full

grant can be restored and protective payee status discontinued when the recipient resumes and maintains full participation in job activities for 12 full weeks.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 26, 2004.

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

Testimony For: Front line staff need a tool to motivate recipients.

Testimony Against: Concerns: Families are often in crisis by the time they ask for help. To make them wait additional time for benefits is harmful. Other aspects of the WorkFirst program are working.

Testified: Senator Val Stevens, prime sponsor (pro); Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society (concerns); Lonnie Johns-Brown, Washington Assn. Educ. of Young Children (concerns); Donna Christensen, Catholic Conference (concerns).