

HOUSE BILL REPORT

E2SSB 5213

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children & Family Services
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to supporting the long-term success of families with children by removing barriers to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the WorkFirst programs.

Brief Description: Supporting the long-term success of families with children by removing barriers to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the WorkFirst programs.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Brandland, Hargrove, Esser, Regala, McAuliffe, Thibaudeau, Stevens, Kohl-Welles and Shin).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 3/24/05, 3/28/05 [DP];

Appropriations: 3/31/05, 4/2/05 [DP].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill

- Exempts individuals from eligibility restrictions under the WorkFirst program on the basis of a drug-related felony conviction or lack of a drug assessment or treatment.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Hinkle, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, Dickerson, Haler and Pettigrew.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Dunn.

Staff: Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

Background:

In 1996, the federal government enacted welfare reform, shifting the emphasis of the federal program to a "work first" approach. In 1997, Washington enacted its version of welfare reform, establishing the WorkFirst program. The WorkFirst program emphasizes the importance of gaining employment and staying employed. WorkFirst participants are assessed for employment barriers which may include mental health, medical, or substance abuse issues that must be addressed before an applicant can become fully employable.

Under the WorkFirst program, public assistance may be awarded to individuals who are in need and otherwise meet the eligibility requirements of the program. Otherwise qualified individuals may be required to participate in a drug or alcohol treatment program in order to receive benefits if they have been assessed as drug- or alcohol-dependent and in need of treatment to become employable.

In addition, in order to be eligible for assistance, an individual with a drug-related felony conviction, after August 21, 1996, must:

- have been assessed as chemically dependent and be participating in, or have completed, a coordinated rehabilitation plan consisting of chemical dependency treatment and vocational services; and
- have not been convicted of a drug-related felony in the three years prior to the most current conviction.

Federal law permits states to opt out of the restrictions on public assistance for individuals with a drug-related felony conviction.

Summary of Bill:

Individuals are no longer ineligible for WorkFirst benefits on the basis of a drug-related felony conviction or lack of a drug assessment or treatment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect September 1, 2005.

Testimony For: This bill is an exact duplicate of HB 1190, which the committee passed out earlier this session, and is very similar to a bill that was heard last year. We need to assist people with re-entry, and that is what this bill is trying to do. If we can eliminate barriers and allow people to become more of a success or at least give them opportunities, we as a society will be far better off. All we are saying here is that just because you have been convicted of a drug felony does not mean that you are not going to be eligible for WorkFirst. You can kill people or molest children in this state and take advantage of social service programs, but if you've been convicted of a drug felony you can't. That makes no sense at all. This bill is not going to have a huge impact, but it is going to impact some of the people trying to re-enter society.

Evidence says that punishment is not the way to get people re-integrated into society, especially from drug felony convictions. It is support for their rehabilitation and support for beating their addiction that's really going to help. This bill is one element that will support people.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Brandland, prime sponsor; and Bob Cooper, American Civil Liberties Union.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Buri, Clements, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Dunshee, Grant, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDermott, McIntire, Miloscia, Pearson, Priest, Schual-Berke, Talcott and Walsh.

Staff: Amy Skei (786-7140).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Children & Family Services:

No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect September 1, 2005.

Testimony For: We recognize that there has been a shift in thinking about drug offenders and that prevention, treatment, and re-entry into society are critically important. For motivated people, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is a gateway to employment. We should help people make the transition to being productive citizens.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Bradland, prime sponsor; and Bob Cooper, American Civil Liberties Union of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.