
**Children & Family Services
Committee**

E2SSB 5213

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 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.

Hearing Date: March 24, 2005.

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.