

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2312

As of March 28, 2007

Title: An act relating to legislative oversight of WorkFirst and temporary assistance to needy families.

Brief Description: Providing legislative oversight of WorkFirst and temporary assistance to needy families.

Sponsors: House Committee on Early Learning & Children's Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Walsh, Kagi, Morrell and Kenney).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/06/07, 96-0.

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections:

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Shani Bauer (786-7468)

Background: The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program was created by the Welfare Reform Law of 1996. TANF became effective July 1, 1997, and replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) programs. TANF provides assistance and work opportunities to needy families by granting states the federal funds and flexibility to develop and implement their own welfare programs. TANF recipients in Washington participate in the WorkFirst program.

Washington's WorkFirst Program manages \$830 million dollars annually. Four state agencies jointly carry out the program: the Department of Social and Health Services; the Employment Security Department; the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

The heads of the partner agencies listed above as well as the Director of the Department of Early Learning form the Workfirst Subcabinet. The subcabinet was formed in 1997 at the inception of the Workfirst program and is chaired by the Director of the Office of Financial Management. The group meets quarterly to monitor program performance and implementation of reform measures.

State legislatures have taken a variety of approaches in providing oversight of their states' TANF/welfare programs, including oversight by standing committees, conducting state audits, or mandating evaluations or studies. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that at least three states have established legislative oversight committees and five states have established oversight committees with both legislative and executive membership.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The WorkFirst Oversight Committee is established for the purposes of monitoring the state's effectiveness in promoting personal responsibility among recipients and in helping them attain long-term sufficiency. The committee is to consist of four legislators, one from each of the major caucuses in each chamber of the Legislature, and the members of the WorkFirst Subcabinet. The committee will meet quarterly and will receive written reports on a monthly basis regarding work participation rates.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: It is a good idea to have legislative oversight to ensure that the intent of legislation is adhered to when new policy is implemented. Workfirst is now ten years old and has been fairly successful. Being managed by the Executive branch has given the program the flexibility to make changes outside of a regularly scheduled legislative session. The downside is that legislators are only included when the program has a crisis situation and they do not necessarily hear about the good things the program is accomplishing. This bill would maintain flexibility but regularize legislative involvement. Legislative oversight would be helpful in the full family sanction process.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Walsh, prime sponsor; Robin Zukoski, Columbia Legal Services; Rachel Frazier, Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition.