

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5328

As of February 10, 2011

Title: An act relating to verification of public assistance eligibility.

Brief Description: Requiring verification of eligibility for public assistance.

Sponsors: Senators Zarelli, Carrell, Hewitt, King, Schoesler, Stevens and Swecker.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/03/11.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

Background: With certain exceptions, any person who applies for public assistance must provide to the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) his or her social security number (SSN). If the person is unable to provide a SSN, either because it is not known or has not been issued, the person must do the following:

- apply for the SSN;
- provide proof that he or she has applied for the SSN; and
- provide the SSN to DSHS when it is received.

DSHS cannot delay providing public assistance to an applicant pending the issuance of a SSN by the Social Security Administration. However, a person who does not comply with the above requirements is not eligible for assistance. For cash, medical, and food assistance benefits, DSHS cannot disqualify a person from receiving benefits for refusing to apply for a SSN based on religious grounds.

DSHS reviews a person's eligibility to receive cash assistance at least once every 12 months, although DSHS can review a person's eligibility at any time if it decides the person's circumstances should be reviewed. At the review, DSHS looks at whether the person continues to meet all eligibility requirements, whether there are any changes since DSHS last determined the person's eligibility, and whether any changes are anticipated for the next review period.

Summary of Bill: DSHS may not provide public assistance to any applicant who has not provided a SSN that has been verified by DSHS as well as written authorization to annually

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electronically transmit the applicant's most recent federal income tax return to DSHS to verify financial eligibility. The applicant must bear the costs of the transmittal.

DSHS must verify that the applicant continues to be eligible to receive public assistance every six months.

A severability clause is included. DSHS is required to seek a federal waiver if any part of this act becomes inoperable because of a conflict with federal requirements or the conflict prevents any part of the act from being fully implemented.

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: We got a lot of input from state employees about how to tighten up the system and make cuts to the system. How do we ensure that the money left on the table actually goes to the people most entitled to receive it? We need to do a better job of making sure people really do qualify for the public assistance programs, and also do a better job throughout the year making sure they continue to qualify, and this bill is designed to do that.

OTHER: As the bill relates to the TANF program, Welfare Advocates Group (WAG) supports it. We are not sure why the bill provides that DSHS can charge the recipient for the cost of obtaining the income tax return because DSHS obtains those now.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Zarelli, prime sponsor; John Ernest Berg III; Chris Keely, Recreational Gaming Assn.

OTHER: Lonnie Johns-Brown, WAG.