
**Early Learning & Human Services
Committee**

HB 1734

Brief Description: Concerning exemptions from the five-year time limit for recipients of the temporary assistance for needy families program.

Sponsors: Representatives Sawyer, Kagi, Goodman, Orwall, Jinkins, Moscoso, Cody, Farrell, Reykdal, Pollet, Ormsby, Riccelli, Wylie, Ryu, Appleton, Roberts, Fey, Bergquist and Santos.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Codifies exemptions from the 60-month time limit for receiving benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and adds more categories under which a recipient may be eligible for an exemption.

Hearing Date: 2/19/13

Staff: Linda Merelle (786-7092).

Background:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a federal block grant established under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The TANF program replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, which had provided grants to poor families with children since the 1930s.

States use TANF block grants to operate their own programs. State programs differ, but operate in accordance with the following purposes set forth in federal law:

- to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;

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- end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

In addition to money received from the federal government, states are required to spend their own funds on programs for needy families or face financial penalties; this is referred to as the Maintenance of Effort (or MOE) requirement.

Hardship Extension.

In 2011 the Legislature placed a 60-month time-limit on TANF benefits. However, some recipients may continue to receive benefits if they qualify for a hardship extension. Under federal statutes, no more than 20 percent of a state's TANF caseload may receive benefits under the hardship exceptions. In the past, the DSHS has extended TANF benefits beyond the 60-month time limit to all households as long as household members were meeting other program requirements. Beginning in 2011, extensions were only allowed for eight categories of hardship. These categories were spelled out in the Washington Administrative Code. A recipient may be exempt from the time limit if the recipient:

- was caring for a disabled child;
- was employed at least 32 hours per week;
- was age 55 years or older and caring for a child that is his or her own;
- was a recipient of Supplemental Security Income;
- was required to be home to care for a child with special needs;
- was required to be home to care for an adult with disabilities;
- has an open child welfare case; or
- met the family violence option criteria.

In November 2012, there were 1623 TANF adult cases where the recipients received benefits for longer than 60 months. This represented 3.3 percent of all TANF cases. The number of extensions has declined by 15 percent since November 2011. The recipient's case may be reviewed every six or 12 months, depending upon the basis for the extension.

Summary of Bill:

The DSHS is permitted to exempt a recipient from the 60-month time limit if the recipient meets hardship requirements or meets the family violence options under federal law. Exemptions that exist under the Washington Administrative Code are codified in statute and the categories of exemption are expanded. A recipient may be exempt if he or she meets the criteria set out in the Administrative Code or one of the following additional or modified categories:

- the family resides in a county with an unemployment rate of 6 percent or more;
- a parent has a temporary mental or physical incapacity;
- a parent is working in unsubsidized employment for more than 20 hours per week; or
- a parent is functionally illiterate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 11, 2013.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.