
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

HB 2667

Brief Description: Concerning eligibility for the essential needs and housing support and the aged, blind, or disabled assistance programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Macri, McBride, Ormsby, Stanford, Senn, Stonier, Kloba, Jinkins, Gregerson, Appleton, Ortiz-Self, Wylie, Doglio, Pollet, Slatter, Fey, Goodman and Santos.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands eligibility for referrals to the Essential Needs and Housing Support (HEN) program to include recipients of the Aged, Blind, or Disabled cash assistance program.
- Requires information sharing of limited recipient data between the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Commerce, and HEN providers

Hearing Date: 1/17/18

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

Aged, Blind, or Disabled Program.

The Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) program provides cash assistance to low-income individuals meeting eligibility requirements. Eligible individuals must be aged 65 or older, be blind, or have a long-term medical condition that is likely to meet federal disability criteria and result in qualification for the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.

The ABD recipients must cooperate with the federal disability application process. To assist with this process, ABD recipients receive SSI facilitation. The SSI facilitators help ABD recipients file applications for SSI and gather necessary medical evidence. The state receives a

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reimbursement for the cost of providing ABD cash assistance when recipients are successfully transitioned to SSI. These reimbursements are referred to as ABD recoveries.

The maximum ABD monthly cash grant is \$197. In 2017 the ABD caseload averaged 20,190 cases. The ABD caseload is forecasted and funded with state general funds appropriated in the biennial operating budget.

Essential Needs and Housing Support Program.

The Essential Needs and Housing Support Program, commonly referred to as HEN, provides rental assistance and other housing support as well as essential needs items such as personal hygiene and household supplies, bus passes, and laundry tokens. Housing support is assistance provided to maintain existing housing when the recipient is at substantial risk of becoming homeless, to obtain housing, or to obtain heat, electricity, natural gas, sewer, garbage, and water services when the recipient is at substantial risk of losing these services. Recipients of HEN referrals do not receive a cash grant.

Eligible individuals must meet income requirements; be temporarily unable to work for at least 90 days due to a physical or mental incapacity; and be ineligible for ABD, temporary assistance for needy families, and other cash assistance programs.

The average monthly HEN benefit ranged from \$450 to \$500 per month, and a monthly average of 6,759 clients were served by the HEN program in fiscal year 2017. The HEN is funded by state general funds appropriated in the biennial operating budget.

Program Referrals.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) determines eligibility for the ABD and the HEN programs. A person is ineligible for both programs when incapacitated primarily due to alcohol or drug dependency. If the person has a separate impairment in addition to alcohol or drug dependency, the individual may be eligible to receive either HEN or ABD assistance if he or she participates in drug or alcohol treatment.

If an individual is eligible for HEN, the DSHS refers that person to the Department of Commerce (COM). The COM administers the HEN program by contracting with local housing assistance providers. Local housing assistance providers determine priority for the rental assistance component of HEN and prioritize HEN recipients or who are homeless and unsheltered.

The HEN recipients must be reviewed for ABD eligibility every 12 months and may apply for ABD at any time. A HEN recipient may be transitioned to ABD if the recipient turns 65 or if his or her condition worsens and he or she becomes likely to meet federal SSI disability criteria.

When the Social Security Administration issues a final SSI disability denial or if the recipient's condition improves, the recipient may be transitioned from ABD cash assistance to a HEN referral.

An individual may not receive ABD cash assistance and a HEN referral at the same time.

Summary of Bill:

A recipient of the ABD who is homeless or at risk of losing stable housing or housing support services is eligible for a referral for the Essential Needs and Housing Support, or HEN, program. The ABD recipient may receive both ABD and HEN assistance concurrently while pending application for federal supplemental security income benefits.

A HEN recipient who transitions to the ABD program may receive both HEN and ABD benefits concurrently.

The restriction that disqualifies an individual for HEN if she or he is unemployable primarily due to alcohol or drug addiction is removed.

The DSHS must share recipient data for HEN-eligible individuals with the COM and HEN providers. The COM must provide designated HEN providers in each county with a secure and current list of individuals eligible for HEN. The list must be updated at least monthly and must include, as available and applicable, the individual's name, address, phone number, shelter location, and case manager contact information.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 11, 2018.

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