

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2667

As of February 22, 2018

Title: An act relating to improving housing stability for people with disabilities and seniors by amending eligibility for the essential needs and housing support and the aged, blind, or disabled assistance programs.

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

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Macri, McBride, Ormsby, Stanford, Senn, Stonier, Kloba, Jinkins, Gregerson, Appleton, Ortiz-Self, Wylie, Doglio, Pollet, Slatter, Fey, Goodman and Santos).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/08/18, 88-10.

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/21/18.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands eligibility for an Essential Needs and Housing Support Program (HEN) referral to individuals who receive Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) assistance.
- Removes the prohibition against HEN assistance for those living with alcohol dependency or substance use disorders.
- Allows persons to receive HEN services and ABD concurrently while awaiting federal supplemental security income benefits (SSI).
- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to share data of HEN-eligible individuals with the Department of Commerce (Commerce).
- Requires Commerce to share basic contact information about HEN-eligible individuals with essential needs and housing support entities.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Brandon Popovac (786-7465)

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.

Background: HEN Program. HEN was created by the Legislature in 2011. It provides access to essential needs items and potential housing assistance for low-income adults who are unable to work for at least 90 days due to a physical or mental incapacity and are ineligible for ABD cash assistance. Commerce is required to distribute funds for HEN through designated essential needs and housing support entities. HEN may provide assistance for: limited rent and utilities, personal health and hygiene items, cleaning supplies, and transportation. Eligibility for a referral to HEN is determined by DSHS. Eligibility for the receipt of HEN services is determined by Commerce. Individuals who are unemployable due to alcohol or drug addiction are not eligible for HEN services.

ABD Program. ABD was established by the Legislature in 2011. ABD is a successor program to the General Assistance and Disability Lifeline programs. Under ABD, DSHS provides cash assistance to eligible low-income adults who are age 65 or older, blind, or determined likely to meet SSI disability criteria based on a physical or mental impairment that is expected to last at least 12 consecutive months. Currently, the maximum monthly grant amount is \$197 for a single person. A person is not eligible for ABD if there has been a final determination that the person is not eligible for federal SSI.

Summary of Bill: HEN referral eligibility is expanded to individuals who receive ABD assistance. Individuals who are unemployable primarily due to alcohol or drug addiction are also eligible for HEN services.

Persons are authorized to receive HEN and ABD concurrently while awaiting federal SSI benefits.

DSHS must share data of HEN-eligible individuals with Commerce. Commerce must share basic contact information about HEN-eligible individuals with essential needs and housing support entities.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately, except for section 3 which takes effect ninety days after adjournment of session.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The financial assistance provided by both programs is a lifeline for individuals with disabilities and seniors living on less than \$339 per month. Both programs represent a vital component of the state's safety net. In 2017, 50 percent of individuals with a mental health disability received ABD assistance and 68 percent received HEN services. HEN services can provide a quick turnaround for persons looking for housing. There is an urgent need and fix for HEN services for both HEN and ABD recipients since there is delayed or stagnant movement from ABD to SSI eligibility. Transitioning from HEN to ABD programs may cause recipients to return to homelessness triggering a new cycle of instability and trauma. The bill would fill in the gap that exists

between the two programs and help leverage the state's existing resources. The bill received significant bipartisan support in the House of Representatives.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Nicole Macri, Prime Sponsor; Michele Thomas, Washington Low Income Housing Alliance; Nicholas Arndt, citizen; David Hlebein, Statewide Poverty Action Network; Christine Crossley, Catholic Community Services; Brian Enslow, SideWalk.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.