

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5898

As of March 22, 2017

Title: An act relating to eligibility for public assistance programs.

Brief Description: Concerning eligibility for public assistance programs.

Sponsors: Senator Braun.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 3/21/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Suspends WorkFirst program work participation requirements for recipients who are a parent or other relative personally providing care for a child under the age of two.
- Requires applicants for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to demonstrate that a job search has been conducted prior to applying for assistance.
- Authorizes persons to receive Aged, Blind, or Disabled assistance benefits pending application for federal Supplemental Security Income for up to 36 months.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Maria Hovde (786-7474)

Background: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). 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 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;

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.

- 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.

WorkFirst. Washington State's TANF program is called WorkFirst and is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Under the WorkFirst program, eligible adults receive various forms of assistance while they participate in activities that will help them connect to the workforce. WorkFirst participants are required to prepare an Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP) that describes in writing their responsibilities, the types of activities in which they are required to participate, and the services that will be received. The federal statutes require a certain participation rate for adults receiving TANF benefits, and states may be penalized if they fail to meet the required participation rate. WorkFirst participants may also be penalized in the form of reduced benefits or other sanctions for noncompliance. Federal statute defines both the activity as well as the length of time that a WorkFirst participant may spend on that activity. These definitions are also codified in state law. A work activity includes unsubsidized and subsidized paid employment, internships, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness assistance, vocational education training, education, and other activities.

Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) Program. The ABD cash assistance program provides a maximum monthly cash grant of \$197 to individuals who are aged 65 or older, blind, or have a long-term medical condition that is likely to meet federal disability criteria; meet income and resource requirements; meet citizenship/alien status requirements; and reside in Washington State. Individuals may receive ABD assistance benefits pending application for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

Summary of Bill: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/WorkFirst. The requirements to prepare an IRP, to participate in work activities, and associated penalties for noncompliance are suspended for recipients who are a parent or other relative personally providing care for a child under the age of two.

All individuals must demonstrate to DSHS that a job search has been conducted prior to applying for assistance in TANF. DSHS is required to adopt rules for the implementation of this requirement.

Aged, Blind, or Disabled Program. Persons may receive ABD assistance benefits pending application for federal SSI benefits for up to 36 months.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 21, 2017.

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

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: CON: Many survivors of domestic violence rely on TANF. More than half of TANF recipients nationally have had experiences with domestic violence. Requiring a job search to be conducted prior to application would put domestic violence survivors at risk by imposing additional barriers to this important financial resource and drive otherwise eligible survivors away. In addition, requiring a job search before applying for TANF creates a barrier for individuals who are homeless. ABD helps older individuals who have experienced domestic violence as well and this is an important lifeline for them. Establishing a limit for ABD benefits are problematic because some applications can take longer than that timeline to be completed. The state is fully reimbursed when individuals successfully transition onto federal benefits. Imposing the time limit would mean that the state will forego We are also concerned that with the loss of this benefit individuals who are incapacitated and cannot work would lose a connection to disability services and support and this could result in decomposition of their physical and/or mental conditions.

Persons Testifying: CON: Pamela Crone, WA State Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Michael Althaus, Columbia Legal Services; Kate Baber, Washington Low Income Housing Alliance.

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