

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1755

As Reported by House Committee On:
Housing, Human Services & Veterans

Title: An act relating to temporary assistance for needy families time limit extensions during times of high unemployment.

Brief Description: Concerning temporary assistance for needy families time limit extensions during times of high unemployment.

Sponsors: Representatives Peterson, Leavitt, Bateman, Davis, Gregerson, Wylie, Sullivan, Simmons, Slatter, Bergquist, Pollet, Riccelli, Ormsby and Kloba; by request of Department of Social and Health Services.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Housing, Human Services & Veterans: 1/13/22, 1/20/22 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to allow a time limit extension to the five-year limit for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families when the most recently published state unemployment rate is 7 percent or higher.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, HUMAN SERVICES & VETERANS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Peterson, Chair; Taylor, Vice Chair; Gilday, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Barkis, Bateman, Chopp, Donaghy and Leavitt.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Caldier, Ranking Minority Member.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Serena Dolly (786-7150).

Background:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a federal block grant that provides temporary cash assistance, subsidized childcare, and work programs for low-income families. With limited exceptions, adult TANF recipients must participate in one or more WorkFirst activities that are identified through an assessment and documented in the recipient's Individual Responsibility Plan. These activities may include paid and unpaid employment-based training programs, career development, community service, work skills assessment and job search training, and vocational training programs. The TANF program is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Five-Year Time Limit.

Federal rules limit the length of time an adult can receive TANF benefits to a cumulative total of five years. Time limit extensions (TLE) may be offered to families on the basis of hardship, as defined by the state, or in instances of family violence. States can extend federal TANF assistance beyond the five-year limit for up to 20 percent of the average monthly caseload.

The DSHS has adopted rules identifying who is eligible for a hardship TLE. Examples of hardship under the adopted rules include a person with severe and chronic disabilities, a person acting as a caregiver for a disabled child or adult, and a person experiencing homelessness, among others.

COVID-19 Policy Changes.

The DSHS adopted emergency rules to expand the TLE criteria to apply to families experiencing hardships during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Between April 1, 2020, and June 30, 2022, any resident of Washington who reaches or has reached the five-year limit is eligible for a hardship TLE.

Beginning July 1, 2022, a recipient may receive a hardship TLE equal to the number of months that the recipient received TANF during a month after March 2020 in which the unemployment rate was higher than 7 percent. The extension must be equal to the number of months that the recipient received TANF and the required unemployment rate was met, and must be applied sequentially to any other hardship extension that may apply.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning July 1, 2022, the DSHS must approve a hardship TLE when the state unemployment rate most recently published by the Employment Security Department (ESD) is 7 percent or higher. The DSHS may adopt rules specifying which published ESD

rates to use for hardship TLEs based on the unemployment rate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The TANF is a lifeline for economic stability and poverty. Strengthening TANF for low-income families with children provides rewards for the entire state. All people should get the help they need, when they need it, and no person should have to go without the essentials. This bill is a smart, technical fix to legislation passed last year and will help in the administration of the time limit extension passed last year. Tying the extension to the most recently published unemployment rate instead of the month benefits are issued is important because final unemployment rates lag.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Strom Peterson, prime sponsor; Senight Zahilay, Northwest Harvest; Lianna Kressin, Statewide Poverty Action Network; and Babs Roberts, Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.