

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2075

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

**Title:** An act relating to establishing service requirements for the department of social and health services.

**Brief Description:** Establishing service requirements for the department of social and health services.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Peterson, Fitzgibbon, Simmons, Morgan, Chopp, Walen, Macri and Sutherland.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Housing, Human Services & Veterans: 2/1/22, 2/3/22 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Establishes minimum service expectations and requirements for the Department of Social and Health Services.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, HUMAN SERVICES & VETERANS

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Peterson, Chair; Taylor, Vice Chair; Gilday, Ranking Minority Member; Barkis, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bateman, Chopp, Donaghy, Jacobsen and Leavitt.

**Staff:** Lena Langer (786-7192).

**Background:**

The Department of Social and Health Services.

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*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.*

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) was established in 1970 and was created by merging the former Department of Health, Department of Public Assistance, Department of Institutions, Veterans' Rehabilitation Council, and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Coordinating Council on Occupational Education. The DSHS was intended to "integrate and coordinate all those activities involving the provision of care for individuals who, as a result of their economic, social, or health condition, require financial assistance, institutional care, rehabilitation, or other social and health services." The DSHS consists of seven program area administrations including:

- the Aging and Long-Term Support Administration;
- the Behavioral Health Administration;
- the Children's Administration;
- the Developmental Disabilities Administration;
- the Economic Services Administration (ESA);
- the Financial Services Administration; and
- the Rehabilitation Administration.

The DSHS ESA services are available in community services offices (CSO), online, and via telephone. As of November 15, 2021, CSO lobbies are open for limited services.

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### **Summary of Substitute Bill:**

#### Minimum Service Requirements.

Minimum service expectations and requirements for the DSHS are established. The DSHS must ensure that clients may apply for and receive services in a manner that is suited to the clients' needs, including but not limited to, technology, language, and ability.

#### *Community Services Offices.*

The CSOs must be open for walk-in and in-person services. The DSHS may not limit which clients are able to use walk-in services or limit which services may be accessed in CSOs. The DSHS must restore a certain level of staffing for in-person services during a state of emergency.

#### *Telephone Access to Services.*

The DSHS must maintain telephonic access to services. The average wait time for a DSHS call center may not exceed 30 minutes. The DSHS must determine the average wait time for client telephone calls per week, and include a measurement of all incoming calls, including dropped calls. The DSHS must report annually to the Legislature and the Governor, beginning November 1, 2022, on the average wait time for client telephone calls per week, the measurement of all incoming calls, and the number of dropped calls.

If the DSHS fails to meet the minimum service requirements of the bill, benefit recipients may not be subject to punitive measures as it relates to their assistance. The DSHS may not terminate or sanction any client's benefits unless the CSOs are fully open and operational to

the public in the client's region.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The requirement for DSHS to report annually to the Legislature and the Governor, beginning November 1, 2022, on the average wait time for client telephone calls per week, the measurement of all incoming calls, and the number of dropped calls is added. Language requiring the State Auditor to monitor average telephone wait times monthly is removed.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 28, 2022.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) When CSOs closed due to COVID-19, people accessing benefits were left behind. As CSOs remain closed to many services, call times have become unreasonable. Clients often experience three hour wait times on telephone calls, often followed by dropped calls. It is important to ensure that there are in-person services at the DSHS, as well as accessible call centers. The DSHS has been tasked with providing services to people who need it most, and they are simply not providing the services needed. This bill holds the DSHS to their commitment to serve. Offering in-person services is absolutely necessary.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The DSHS always intends to provide excellent customer service. The DSHS has taken action recently to examine the problems the bill addresses, brainstorm solutions, and form an action plan. The DSHS needs adequate infrastructure and sufficient staffing levels in place, and it currently does not have them. The State Auditor is unable to provide the monitoring required in the bill.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Strom Peterson, prime sponsor; Sara Robbins, Seattle and King County Coalition on Homelessness; Dawn Shepard, REACH; and Dan Wise, Catholic Community Services.

(Other) Scott Nelson, Office of the Washington State Auditor; and Babs Roberts, Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.