
Housing, Human Services & Veterans Committee

2SSB 5214

Brief Description: Concerning economic assistance programs.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Nguyen, Dhingra, Darneille, Das, Frockt, Hasegawa, Hunt, Kuderer, Lias, Lovelett, Nobles, Robinson, Stanford and Wilson, C.).

Brief Summary of Second Substitute 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 for months when the state unemployment rate was 7 percent or higher.
- Applies the bill prospectively and retroactively as of March 1, 2020.

Hearing Date: 3/18/21

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

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 (IRP). 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

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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. For federal fiscal year 2019, 5.4 percent of the state's caseload exceeded the five-year limit due to an approved hardship or family violence waiver.

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.

Beginning July 1, 2021, the DSHS must approve a TLE for hardship when the recipient's family includes a child or youth who is without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as described in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

COVID-19 Policy Changes.

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

State Unemployment Rates.

The state Employment Security Department (ESD) reports Washington's seasonally adjusted unemployment rates between March 2020 and December 2020 as:

Month-Year	03-20	04-20	05-20	06-20	07-20	08-20	09-20	10-20	11-20	12-20
Rate	5.1%	16.3%	15.1%	10.0%	10.2%	8.5%	8.3%	6.0%	5.7%	7.1%

Summary of Second Substitute Bill:

The DSHS must add to hardship criteria rules to allow a TLE when the recipient received TANF during a month after March 1, 2020, when the state unemployment rate was seven percent or higher and the recipient is otherwise eligible.

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.

The provisions of the act apply both prospectively and retroactively to March 1, 2020.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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