
Housing, Human Services & Veterans Committee

2SSB 5241

Brief Description: Promoting economic inclusion.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Dhingra, Nguyen, Darneille, Das, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Liias, Nobles, Saldaña, Stanford and Wilson, C.).

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Creates local economic inclusion grants, subject to appropriation, to be administered by the Department of Commerce (COM) in partnership with other agencies and distributed to local communities.
- Establishes requirements for recipients of the local economic inclusion grants.
- Requires annual reporting by the COM on progress and other information regarding the local economic inclusion grants to the Governor, Legislature, and the Legislative Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Task Force.

Hearing Date: 2/17/22

Staff: Lena Langer (786-7192).

Background:

Legislative-Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Oversight Task Force.

The Legislative-Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Oversight (Task Force) oversees the operation of the WorkFirst and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs.

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 voting membership of the Task Force is comprised of eight state agency representatives and eight members of the Legislature. The state agency partners provide staff support to the Task Force. Agency partners include the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS); the Department of Commerce (COM); the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF); the Employment Security Department (ESD); the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; the Department of Health; the Department of Corrections; and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. In 2019, the Task Force published its Five-Year Plan to Reduce Intergenerational Poverty and Promote Self-Sufficiency.

Poverty Reduction Work Group/Steering Committee.

The Poverty Reduction Work Group (Work Group) was established by the Governor in 2017 and evolved into the Poverty Reduction Steering Committee (Steering Committee), which advises the Task Force. Legislative and executive branch membership of the Task Force and Work Group overlap to some extent, with additional members representing other public and private entities. In 2020, the Work Group published The 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington with the goal of building a just and equitable future in which all of Washingtonians have their foundational needs met, and the resources and the opportunities they need to thrive.

Measures of Economic Recovery.

An affiliate of the Steering Committee, the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Economic Recovery is comprised of state agency members and representatives of organizations focused on poverty reduction. The TAG published a "Proposed Vision, Measures, and Process Toward a Just & Equitable Future" in March 2021. The TAG recommends annual and interim reporting on various outcomes and conditions that define and guide economic recovery efforts, including a measure of the number of people living above the University of Washington Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) as a baseline of economic well-being.

Self-Sufficiency Standard.

The University of Washington has created a SSS to measure the income necessary to meet a household's basic needs without public assistance. The SSS varies by county and household composition, both in the age of the household members and the size of the household. For example, the SSS for a household consisting of one adult and two children in Thurston County was \$56,279 in 2020.

2021 Federal Poverty Guideline.

Many federally funded programs use the federal poverty guidelines adopted annually by the Department of Health and Human Services to determine eligibility for public assistance. The poverty guidelines vary by household size, but not by geographic location or age of household members. The 2022 federal poverty guideline for a household of three is an annual income at or below \$23,030. Two hundred percent of the guideline for a household of three is \$46,060.

Summary of Bill:

Economic Inclusion Grants.

The COM, in consultation with the DSHS, the ESD, the DCYF, the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA), and the Steering Committee, must oversee the implementation of economic inclusion grants for local communities. The grants are to promote equity, economic inclusion, and a stable financial foundation for people experiencing poverty, with a focus on people of color and people in rural counties. People experiencing poverty are defined as households with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

The primary purpose of the grants is to empower and incentivize local communities to coordinate existing poverty reduction resources and benefits, and to improve access through system coordination.

Subject to available funds, grants must be made available statewide with an emphasis on economically distressed communities as defined by the COM.

Economic Inclusion Grant recipients must:

- coordinate existing poverty reduction resources and benefits to improve access for those in need;
- identify federal regulations that prevent better local coordination and the need for additional state or federal funding for continuous improvement of the poverty reduction system in future years;
- develop a local leadership coalition or use an existing local partnership that must include people experiencing poverty, people of color, homelessness programs, and representatives of the Workforce Development Council (WDC), the HCA Community Service Offices, Accountable Communities of Health, and Associate Development Organizations;
- identify a fiscal agent and lead coordinator that is either an Associate Development Council, WDC or other organization with demonstrated capacity to fulfill the responsibilities of a fiscal agent as defined by the COM;
- work with people experiencing poverty to ensure they have access to multiple benefits to help them meet their basic needs, in alignment with local care coordination efforts, and develop individualized career plans (ICP) leading to a self-sufficiency wage established by the SSS or 200 percent of the federal poverty level;
- provide streamlined access to local partners who can pay for education or training elements of a person's ICP using federal Pell Grants, the Washington College Grant, or other resources;
- provide streamlined access to local partners who can make monthly payments to the low-income person while in training using existing resources such as work study payments and others to maximize total benefits available to the person while not reducing other public benefits;
- develop a local coordination team to ensure easier access to all state and local government services and identify staff to be Care and Benefits Navigators (CBN) using existing community coordinators and navigators if available. The CBN must provide one-stop access to benefits available to people experiencing poverty;
- encourage people served to apply for and, if eligible, receive: Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program benefits, TANF, Medicaid, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity

Act supportive services, or other financial and health benefits. To the extent allowed by federal law, access to benefits may not be conditioned upon seeking employment or limited to individuals pursuing ICPs;

- ensure equitable access to state and local government services for people with disabilities, which may include equipment and technology purchases;
- identify where federal barriers hinder efforts to coordinate benefits and elevate those issues to the COM;
- ensure options for career development, English language learners, and other services for both parents in two-parent families, including child care if desired by the family; and
- coordinate with similar federally funded or driven service coordination efforts as appropriate.

If an applicant has not submitted adequate documentation to participate within three months after the grant's announcement, the agencies may redistribute the unclaimed funding to other participating local areas.

The COM must consult with the Steering Committee in the management of the grants. Members of the Steering Committee must be reimbursed for travel, child care, and other expenses associated with attending up to 12 meetings per year to provide consultative assistance to the Commerce and partner agencies.

Federal Waivers and Other Policies.

The COM, in consultation with agency partners and the Steering Committee, must develop a comprehensive list of federal waivers to remove federal barriers to coordinating service delivery across programs and report annually to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Task Force beginning November 15, 2021. Where waivers are not possible, the COM must instead include information in the report about federal rules or policies that are creating barriers. The report must include progress reports, an estimate of costs avoided by the state when a person moves out of poverty, measures of equitable and inclusive economic recovery, and model legislative language to expand economic inclusion, reduce poverty, and improve service coordination.

The COM may apply for federal waivers and propose federal law changes to make the authorizing environment better support coordinated service delivery across programs.

Measures of Economic Recovery.

The DSHS, in consultation with agency partners and the Steering Committee, must further develop measures and indicators of equitable and inclusive economic recovery already underway by the TAG, and apply those measures as needed to promote economic recovery that is racially equitable and fully inclusive of key demographics that have historically been left behind in economic recovery.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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