

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2075

As of February 18, 2022

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: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Peterson, Fitzgibbon, Simmons, Morgan, Chopp, Walen, Macri and Sutherland).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/15/22, 97-1.

Committee Activity: Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation: 2/18/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes minimum service expectations and requirements for the Department of Social and Health Services Economic Service Administration's Community Services Division.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, REENTRY & REHABILITATION

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services. 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. 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. DSHS consists of seven program area administrations, including the Economic Services Administration (ESA), which houses the

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Community Services Division (CSD), the Division of Child Support, and the Division of Disability Determination Services. CSD administers a number of public assistance programs.

CSD and other services are available in community services offices (CSO), online, and via telephone. There are 53 CSOs located throughout the state.

Currently, all but one CSO are open for the following limited services:

- pick up electronic benefit transfer cards, authorized bus passes, and gas cards between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m;
- pick up consent and interim assistance reimbursement agreement forms for the Aged, Blind & Disabled application process, when the individual has general delivery mail services or participates in the Address Confidentiality Program between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m;
- pick up preauthorized WorkFirst support service vouchers between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m;
- pick up verification, such as a copy of a photo ID, DSHS letters, or receipt of public assistance to apply for a reduced-price ID card with the Department of Licensing between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m;
- access to a CSO lobby phone for customers who do not have access to a phone, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. to connect directly to the Customer Service Contact Center; and
- access to a CSO lobby computer for customers who do not have access to a computer, to access WashingtonConnection.org online services between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Summary of Bill: It is the intent of the Legislature to establish minimum service expectations and requirements for DSHS's Economic Services Administration (ESA) Community Service Division (CSD). The Legislature intends to prohibit CSD from imposing punitive measures against individuals when they have attempted to contact or access the CSO and are unable to connect due to long wait times over the phone or due to the closure of its offices, to extent allowable under federal and state law.

The following minimum service expectations and requirements for DSHS's CSD are established:

- CSD must ensure that clients may apply for and receive services in a reasonable and accessible manner that is suited to the clients' needs, including, but not limited to, meeting client needs related to technology, language, and ability;
- CSO must be open for walk-in and in-person services during normal business hours;
 - CSD may not limit which clients are able to use walk-in and in-person services or limit which services may be accessed in community services offices;
 - DSHS retains the right to close an office for emergency, health, safety, and welfare issues;
- CSD must maintain telephonic access to services;
 - CSD must strive to ensure that clients do not experience total call wait times

- that exceed 30 minutes; and
- CSD must monitor the average wait time for client telephone calls per week, and include a measurement of all incoming calls, including dropped calls.

Beginning November 1, 2022, and annually thereafter, DSHS must report to the Legislature and the Governor:

- the average wait time for client telephone calls per week;
- the measurement of all incoming calls;
- the number of dropped calls
- and the methodology DSHS uses to monitor this information.

By November 1, 2022, DSHS must provide the Legislature recommendations on achieving the goal of 30-minute call wait times, including recommendations on staffing, technology, and any other infrastructure needed to efficiently serve clients.

Where a cash and food assistance applicant or recipient is negatively affected by excessive call wait times, dropped calls, or CSD office closures during normal business hours, DSHS must prioritize processing the applicant's application and may not take negative action, both to the extent allowed under state and federal law.

Appropriation: The bill contains a null and void clause requiring specific funding be provided in an omnibus appropriation act.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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: PRO: In March of 2020, all CSO were closed to the public due to the pandemic. Anyone with benefits had to go online or call, some people waiting three to eight hours. We need to maintain staff on-site so everyone can access their safety net. There are some benefits you can only apply for at a CSO.

OTHER: This is an important issue, long wait times and closed offices are not acceptable and DSHS is working with the Legislature on making this proposal workable. CSOs are fully reopening as soon as possible, by the end of the month. The demands on the line staff are great at this time and we need to make sure they have the resources they need to do their job.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Strom Peterson, Prime Sponsor; Sara Robbins, Seattle / King County Coalition on Homelessness; Dan Wise, Catholic Community Services; Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition.

OTHER: Ellen Nolan, DSHS; Sandra Toussaint, AFSCME Council 28/WFSE.

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