

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5413

As of January 25, 2023

Title: An act relating to housing for essential needs and aged, blind, and disabled assistance programs.

Brief Description: Concerning housing for essential needs and aged, blind, and disabled assistance programs.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Dhingra, Kuderer, Robinson, Saldaña and Valdez.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/25/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Eliminates the requirement that recipients of the Aged, Blind and Disabled Cash Assistance Program (ABD) repay ABD benefits received when that person subsequently receives Supplemental Security Income payments for the same period.
- Directs the Department of Commerce to provide 12 months of support to a client deemed eligible for the Essential and Housing Needs Support Referral Program (HEN).
- Makes a number of statutory changes to the ABD and HEN programs.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

Background: Department of Social and Health Services. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) offers a number of programs, including administering a number of public benefit programs, including the Aged, Blind, or Disabled Cash Assistance Program (ABD) and determining eligibility for a referral to the Essential Needs and Housing Referral

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.

Program (HEN).

Aged, Blind, or Disabled Cash Assistance Program. ABD is a state-funded program that provides cash assistance and a referral to HEN to eligible low-income individuals who are age 65 or older, blind or determined likely to meet Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability criteria based on an impairment or impairments expected to last at least 12 consecutive months. This program provides maximum monthly cash grants of \$417 for a single individual, or \$528 for a married couple. ABD recipients are also eligible for assistance applying for SSI benefits.

ABD is available to Washington residents who are:

- age 65 or older, blind, or have a long-term medical condition that is likely to meet federal disability criteria;
- are at least 18 years old, or if under 18, a member of a married couple;
- meet income and resource requirements; and
- meet citizenship or alien status requirements.

Essential and Housing Needs Referral Program. HEN is a state-funded program that provides access to essential needs items, and potential rental assistance for low-income individuals who are unable to work for at least 90 days due to a physical or mental incapacity, or both. While DSHS determines eligibility for the referral to the HEN program, actual eligibility for rental assistance and essential needs items is determined by the Department of Commerce (Commerce) through a network of homeless and homeless prevention service providers, including local governments.

HEN may include limited rent and utility assistance, move-in costs, personal health and hygiene items, cleaning supplies, and transportation assistance.

The entity administering HEN shall give first priority for a HEN referral to clients who are homeless, and second priority to clients who would be at substantial risk of losing stable housing without housing support. The entities must use HEN funds as flexibly as is practical to provide essential needs items and housing support to HEN recipients.

A HEN referral may be available for Washington residents who:

- are unable to work for at least 90 days due to a physical or mental incapacity;
- are at least 18 years old, or if under 18, legally emancipated or a member of a married couple;
- meet income and resource requirements; and
- meet citizenship or alien status requirements

A person may receive both HEN and ABD benefits concurrently while they have an application pending for federal SSI benefits. The monetary value of ABD benefits that is subsequently duplicated by the person's receipt of SSI for the same period, those ABD benefits are considered a debt due to the state and must be repaid.

Summary of Bill: A number of changes and clarifications are made to the HEN and ABD programs, including:

- a person deemed eligible for HEN is to receive 12 months of consecutive support from the date Commerce submits its first rent subsidy on behalf of the recipient;
- the HEN priority for clients who are homeless or would be at substantial risk of losing stable housing is struck;
- codifying that HEN entities may continue to serve clients that move outside of county service areas to other county service areas within the state with the added requirement that the client notify the entity that serves the geographic area where the client is moving, and directs Commerce to support both entities, which may include financial assistance;
- forms used by individuals applying for HEN are designed in a manner that the form may be shared with DSHS;
- when reviewing a HEN recipient's continuing eligibility, the new authorization period is 12 months;
- DSHS is to share client data for individuals eligible for HEN with Commerce and housing support entities as required; and
- ABD recipients who subsequently receive SSI benefits for the same period are not required to repay ABD benefits.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 22, 2023.

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: People need to be able to move between the HEN program and ABD without being worried they will become unhoused. Removing the requirement to payback the ABD benefit is important. This bill modernizes HEN programs and helps disabled adults with housing and rent assistance for 12 months. This is helpful as most clients are housed in the private market and this would provide some assurance to landlords.

OTHER: There needs to be a plan in place for aging families with dependents, This bill would be helpful for families with a parent that has medical issues and a child with developmental disabilities.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Dan Wise, Catholic Community Services; Melanie Smith, Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness.

OTHER: Michele Lehosky, Self .

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