

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5889

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Human Services, January 18, 2024

Title: An act relating to enhancing poverty reduction, equity, and access efforts by establishing the customer voice council and strengthening community partnerships.

Brief Description: Establishing the customer voice council.

Sponsors: Senators Kauffman, Frame, Hasegawa, Keiser, Kuderer, Liias, Nguyen, Nobles, Shewmake, Stanford and Wilson, C.; by request of Department of Social and Health Services.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/11/24, 1/18/24 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to establish a statewide public assistance Customer Service Voice Council, effective January 1, 2025.
- Directs DSHS to create local community partnership groups to work on local issues and advise DSHS on policies related to public assistance, among other things.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wilson, C., Chair; Kauffman, Vice Chair; Frame, Nguyen and Warnick.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Boehnke, Ranking Member; Wilson, J..

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.

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

Background: The Economic Services Administration (ESA) of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) administers a number of public assistance programs, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and WorkFirst, as well as providing other services. ESA's core services focus on:

- Poverty Reduction & Self-Sufficiency;
- Child Support Enforcement & Financial Recovery; and
- Disability Determination.

WorkFirst is Washington's program to assist recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to meet their goals and provide well-being for their family. DSHS works with local communities for the purpose of planning WorkFirst programs and for distributing WorkFirst resources.

The Legislative-Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Oversight Task Force (LEWPRO) oversees the operation of WorkFirst and TANF programs, and determine evidence-based outcome measures for the WorkFirst program. LEWPRO also develops and monitors strategies to prevent and address adverse childhood experiences and reduce intergenerational poverty. LEWPRO serves as an advisory capacity to recommend policy actions to the Governor and the Legislature to effectively reduce intergenerational poverty and promote and encourage self-sufficiency.

Intergenerational Poverty Advisory Committee (Committee) advises LEWPRO. The Committee makes recommendations on how to effectively address the needs of children affected by intergenerational poverty and to achieve LEWPRO purposes, support recommendations with verifiable data, and gather input from diverse communities of intergenerational poverty on certain outcomes.

Summary of Bill: Effective July 1, 2025, DSHS is to establish a statewide public assistance Customer Service Voice Council, and provide staffing and training to support the council. Members of the Council are to be either current or former recipients of state public assistance and are compensated as provided for by statute.

DSHS is to consult with the following groups in setting policies and membership for the Customer Service Voice Council: LEWPRO, the Committee, and the local community partnership groups as established by this bill. DSHS is to ensure local community partnership groups are established and provide them with staffing assistance. Communities may determine the specific structure and composition of these groups based on community needs and existing resources.

Local community groups are to meet at least quarterly and shall:

- elevate customer voices in the development and evaluation of local public assistance practices, providing experience to support participating in the Customer Service

Voice Council;

- promote effective communication and collaboration among DSHS's local community services office, people with experience living in poverty, local governments, community action agencies, and other service providers;
- advise and comment on DSHS program policies;
- work to resolve local issues including client referral and service gaps;
- review local data and racial, ethnic, and other disproportionality trends;
- review public assistance client feedback;
- propose innovative and evidence-based collaborative services; and
- provide input for the plans regarding local aspects of the WorkFirst program and other reductions efforts in the region.

By July 31, 2025, and each subsequent odd-number year, community partnership programs are to develop a plan for the local aspects of the WorkFirst program and other poverty reduction efforts for each region. Local consultation is to include to the greatest extent possible, input from current or former WorkFirst participants and other public assistance recipients, among others.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 7, 2024.

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: This amplifies the experience and voice of those with lived experience. Community voice councils will provide feedback that informs local practices which is helpful in a regionally diverse state. It is vital that people provide input for poverty reduction, included those directed impacted by the programs offered. This approach aligns with the 10 year plan to dismantle poverty.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claudia Kauffman, Prime Sponsor; Babs Roberts, Department of Social and Health Services - Economic Services Administration.

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