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**SENATE BILL 5311**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Braun, Boehnke, Christian, Gildon, Schoesler, and Warnick

AN ACT Relating to increasing work participation rates for able-bodied working-age adults receiving cash and food assistance; amending RCW 74.08.025, 74.08A.260, and 74.08A.120; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 74.08.025 and 2019 c 343 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Public assistance may be awarded to any applicant:

(a) Who is in need and otherwise meets the eligibility requirements of department assistance programs; and

(b) Who has not made a voluntary assignment of property or cash for the purpose of qualifying for an assistance grant; and

(c) Who is not an inmate of a public institution except as a patient in a medical institution or except as an inmate in a public institution who could qualify for federal aid assistance: PROVIDED, That the assistance paid by the department to recipients in nursing homes, or receiving nursing home care, may cover the cost of clothing and incidentals and general maintenance exclusive of medical care and health services. The department may pay a grant to cover the cost of clothing and personal incidentals in public or private medical institutions and institutions for tuberculosis. The department shall allow recipients in nursing homes to retain, in addition to the grant to cover the cost of clothing and incidentals, wages received for work as a part of a training or rehabilitative program designed to prepare the recipient for less restrictive placement to the extent permitted under Title XIX of the federal social security act.

(2) Any person otherwise qualified for temporary assistance for needy families who is assessed through the state alcohol and substance abuse program as drug or alcohol-dependent and requiring treatment to become employable shall be required by the department to participate in a drug or alcohol treatment program as a condition of benefit receipt.

(3) Pursuant to 21 U.S.C. 862a(d)(1), the department shall exempt individuals from the eligibility restrictions of 21 U.S.C. 862a(a)(1) and (2) to ensure eligibility for temporary assistance for needy families benefits and federal food assistance.

(4) The department shall implement a permanent disqualification for adults who have been terminated due to WorkFirst noncompliance sanctions three or more times since March 1, 2007 and whose latest termination occurs after the effective date of this section. A household that includes an adult who has been permanently disqualified from receiving temporary assistance for needy families shall be ineligible for further temporary assistance for needy families assistance.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.08A.260 and 2020 c 338 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Each recipient shall be assessed after determination of program eligibility and before referral to job search. Assessments shall be based upon factors that are critical to obtaining employment, including but not limited to education, availability of child care, history of family violence, history of substance abuse, and other factors that affect the ability to obtain employment. Assessments may be performed by the department or by a contracted entity. The assessment shall be based on a uniform, consistent, transferable format that will be accepted by all agencies and organizations serving the recipient.

(2) Based on the assessment, an individual responsibility plan shall be prepared that: (a) Sets forth an employment goal and a plan for maximizing the recipient's success at meeting the employment goal; (b) considers WorkFirst educational and training programs from which the recipient could benefit; (c) contains the obligation of the recipient to participate in the program by complying with the plan; (d) moves the recipient into full-time WorkFirst activities as quickly as possible; and (e) describes the services available to the recipient either during or after WorkFirst to enable the recipient to obtain and keep employment and to advance in the workplace and increase the recipient's wage earning potential over time.

(3) Recipients who are not engaged in work and work activities, and do not qualify for a good cause exemption under RCW 74.08A.270, shall engage in self-directed service as provided in RCW 74.08A.330.

(4) If a recipient refuses to engage in work and work activities required by the department, ((~~after two months of continuous noncompliance,~~)) the family's grant shall be reduced by the recipient's share ((~~or by forty percent, whichever is greater, and must be terminated after twelve~~)) and the department shall notify the recipient that the grant will be terminated if the case is not brought back into compliance within two months. The grant shall be terminated after two months of continuous noncompliance.

(5) The department ((~~shall~~)) may waive the penalties required under subsection (4) of this section, subject to a finding that the recipient refused to engage in work for good cause provided in RCW 74.08A.270.

(6) In consultation with the recipient, the department or contractor shall place the recipient into a work activity that is available in the local area where the recipient resides.

(7) Assessments conducted under this section shall include a consideration of the potential benefit to the recipient of engaging in financial literacy activities. The department shall consider the options for financial literacy activities available in the community, including information and resources available through the financial education public-private partnership created under RCW 28A.300.450. The department may authorize up to ten hours of financial literacy activities as a core activity or an optional activity under WorkFirst.

(8) Subsections (2) through (6) of this section are suspended for a recipient who is a parent or other relative personally providing care for a child under the age of two years. This suspension applies to both one and two parent families. However, both parents in a two-parent family cannot use the suspension during the same month. Nothing in this subsection shall prevent a recipient from participating in the WorkFirst program on a voluntary basis.

**Sec.**  RCW 74.08A.120 and 2020 c 136 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department may establish a food assistance program for legal immigrants and victims of human trafficking as defined in RCW 74.04.005 who are ineligible for the federal food stamp program.

(2) The rules for the state food assistance program shall follow ((~~exactly~~)) the rules of the federal food stamp program except for the provisions pertaining to ((~~immigrant status~~)):

(a) Immigrant status; and

(b) Any suspension of work requirements.

(3) The benefit under the state food assistance program shall be established by the legislature in the biennial operating budget.

(4) The department may enter into a contract with the United States department of agriculture to use the existing federal food stamp program coupon system for the purposes of administering the state food assistance program.

(5) In the event the department is unable to enter into a contract with the United States department of agriculture, the department may issue vouchers to eligible households for the purchase of eligible foods at participating retailers.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act takes effect February 1, 2026.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected.

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