

HCS HB 654 -- NONMEDICAL PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

SPONSOR: Allen

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 9 to 3. Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Select Committee on Social Services by a vote of 6 to 3.

This bill specifies that beginning January 1, 2016, any parent or caretaker seeking assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF) must engage in work activities before becoming eligible for benefits unless the individual is otherwise exempt from the work requirement.

If, after an investigation, the Department of Social Services determines that a parent or caretaker is not cooperating with a work activity requirement under the program, a representative of the department must meet face-to-face with the person to explain the potential sanction and the requirements to cure the sanction. After the meeting, the person must have six weeks to comply with the work activity requirement, during which time no sanction of benefits must occur. If the person does not comply with the work activity requirement within that six-week period, the department must immediately apply a sanction terminating 50% of the amount of temporary assistance benefits to or for the individual and his or her family for a maximum of 10 weeks. To cure the sanction, he or she must perform work activities for at least a minimum average of 30 hours per week for one month. If the individual does not cure the sanction, the case must be closed.

To return to the TANF Program after having been sanctioned off the caseload, the parent or caretaker must complete work activities for a minimum average of 30 hours per week within one month of the temporary assistance eligibility interview. These provisions do not prohibit the state from providing child care or any other related social or support services for the individual who is eligible for financial assistance but to whom that assistance is not paid because of his or her failure to cooperate with the work activity.

In order to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, when a TANF benefits recipient marries, the new spouse's income and assets must be disregarded for six consecutive months, and this disregard must be a once-in-a-lifetime benefit for the recipient.

Of the money received by the state under the federal TANF block grant during each fiscal year, the department must, consistent with

federal law and subject to appropriation, set aside a minimum of:

(1) Two percent of the moneys to fund the Alternatives to Abortion Services Program under Section 188.325, RSMo, and the Alternatives to Abortion Public Awareness Program under Section 188.335; and

(2) Two percent of the moneys to fund healthy marriage promotion activities and activities promoting responsible fatherhood as defined in the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

It is the intent of the General Assembly that funding authorized under these provisions must be used to supplement, not supplant, other sources of revenue heretofore or hereafter used for the purposes of these provisions.

PROPOSERS: Supporters of the bill say that the lack of a work requirement in Missouri likely has a significant impact on individuals actually working as opposed to viewing TANF as a more long-term program. The current system keeps people dependent upon the government. Requiring work activity helps encourage individuals to move toward being productive citizens and can help individuals to gain skills to move out of poverty.

Testifying for the bill was Representative Allen.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that there are so many situations that prohibit someone from being able to work. The bill doesn't improve the situation for those individuals who are on TANF and would cause even more problems for already problem-riddled people. It is hard for these individuals to meet a work requirement because the TANF income limits are so low. If a person gets a job, he or she cannot get TANF. If an individual receives TANF, he or she is guaranteed to have high hurdles to employment. Missouri doesn't spend the money from the TANF block grant on promoting work activities and preparing individuals to work and supporting them as they work. To help, the department should increase the amount and quality of interactions with families receiving services to figure out what each individual's barriers are to escaping poverty. There is currently nothing that the department does to help discover these barriers and assist in overcoming the barriers.

Testifying against the bill was Empower Missouri.