
**Early Learning & Children's
Services Committee**

2SSB 6016

Brief Description: Concerning good cause reasons for failure to participate in WorkFirst program components.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Regala and Kohl-Welles).

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Revises the participation requirement under WorkFirst for a parent with a child under the age of one year.

Hearing Date: 3/29/07

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

WorkFirst is Washington's program of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under WorkFirst, recipients of public assistance are assessed prior to referral to job search activities. Information obtained through the assessment is used to develop an individual responsibility plan (IRP) that includes an employment goal; a plan for obtaining employment as quickly as possible; and a description of services available to enable the recipient to obtain and keep employment.

Unless a good cause exemption applies, recipients of public assistance must be engaged in work or work activities as a condition of continued eligibility. Good cause exemptions include situations where necessary child care is unavailable for an incapacitated or dependent child under age six, and situations where a parent has a child under one year of age. State law allows a parent to claim the exemption for a child under one year only once for one child. Federal regulations permit applying this exemption up to a maximum of 12 months for the individual's lifetime.

For a recipient claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under one year of age, an assessment is conducted to determine specific service needs or employment barriers, including

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substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or domestic violence services. Information from the assessment is used in developing the parent's IRP.

Beginning when the child is three months old, the parent is required to participate in one or more specified activities for up to 20 hours per week. These activities include: parenting skills instruction or training; job readiness training; high-school diploma or general educational development (GED) certificate courses; or volunteering in a licensed child-care facility.

Summary of Bill:

For a parent claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under one year of age, the 20-hour per week participation requirement is triggered when the child reaches six months of age rather than three months. All parents claiming a good cause exemption may be required to participate up to 20 hours per week in mental health, alcohol, or drug treatment if such treatment is indicated by a comprehensive evaluation.

The one-time one-child limit on claiming a good cause exemption for parenting a child under the age of one year is removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.