

Lifeline Support System Pilot Project



Project report per Section (157)(c) of the 2022 operating budget

**OFFICE OF HOMELESS YOUTH
PREVENTION & PROTECTION**

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Report to the Legislature

Interim Director Kendrick Stewart

Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

Overview

The 2022 supplemental operating budget ([Chapter 297, Laws of 2022](#)) allocated funding for the Department of Commerce (Commerce) to establish a Lifeline Support System pilot project to assist individuals who have experienced or are at risk of entering public systems of care:

By December 31, 2022, the department, with assistance from the work group, must provide a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature on approaches to continue this pilot project in the 2023-2025 fiscal biennium.

The Lifeline is intended to serve as a no-wrong-door access point for support and connection to services for individuals in Washington who require assistance to overcome a life challenge that could escalate into a crisis if not addressed. The Legislature directed Commerce to co-convene a work group in partnership with a nonprofit organization to design a lifeline support services system and framework for statewide implementation. For the implementation of the initial pilot, the design work group assessed feasibility, identified critical design elements and populations to target, while recognizing the limitations of funding and timelines to realize a broad vision in the short term.

Recommendations

Extend pilot an additional two years

In fiscal year 2023, the work group was developed to design the Lifeline Support System pilot. NorthStar Advocates was competitively awarded \$40,000 to serve as the partner nonprofit to implement the pilot for six months. However, six months was insufficient to build infrastructure, train staff, conduct outreach and marketing, and have enough information to adequately evaluate the program.

The Office of Homeless Youth recommends extending the pilot for two more years through the 2023-25 biennium. This would accomplish several important goals:

- Continuing the pilot at the current level of funding (\$750,000 per fiscal year) would allow the pilot to continue in its current iteration.
- Increasing the level of funding would allow the pilot to broaden its scope to serve more people beyond the target population identified by the work group for purposes of the six-month pilot, bringing the project into better alignment with the proviso as currently written.
- Extending the timeline of the pilot will allow for continued evaluation.

Based on the learnings from the evaluation, we anticipate modifications and improvements to be made within the pilot and that additional recommendations may be made to the Legislature for the 2024 supplemental budget.

Clarify the proviso language

The project would benefit from clarification in the proviso language, particularly in defining the scope of the populations served. The proviso directs the project to "assist individuals who have experienced or are at risk of entering into public systems of care." It is unclear how broadly to interpret the population "at risk of entering public systems of care." This could arguably apply to anyone in Washington experiencing any level of risk.

It is also unclear if there is an intended age group for the Lifeline to serve. Those who have experienced or are at risk of public system involvement could include individuals of all ages, from children to seniors. The proviso also references services provided to "youth and young adults and their supports." The design work group addressed the ambiguity of the project's scope by assessing feasibility and identifying priorities and target populations.

Introduction

Authorizing statute

The 2022 supplemental operating budget allocated funding for the Department of Commerce to establish a Lifeline Support System pilot project to assist individuals who have experienced or are at risk of entering into public systems of care, per the following proviso:

(157)(a) \$750,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 is provided solely for the department to establish a lifeline support system pilot project to assist individuals who have experienced or are at risk of entering into public systems of care. Public systems of care include office of homeless youth prevention and protection shelter and housing programs, the juvenile justice system, dependency under chapter 13.34 RCW, and inpatient behavioral health treatment.

(b)(i) The lifeline must function as a no-wrong-door access point for support and connections to services for qualifying individuals who require assistance to overcome a life challenge that could escalate into a crisis, or who are in need of general mentorship and counsel. The lifeline support system must facilitate and promote partnerships across state agencies, federally recognized tribes, counties, and community-based providers to coordinate trauma-informed and culturally responsive services for youth and young adults and their supports. The department is authorized to implement lifeline services through contracts with community partners and nonprofit organizations.

(ii) The department must establish a lifeline fund. Moneys in the fund can be used to assist community partners and nonprofit organizations to implement lifeline services when they cannot identify an existing resource to resolve a beneficiary need. The department must establish an application process and criteria for the fund.

(c) The department and a nonprofit organization, selected by the office of homeless youth, shall co-convene a work group that will design a lifeline support services system and framework for statewide implementation. This group shall have an inaugural meeting no later than August 31, 2022, and have a design ready no later than October 31, 2022. By December 31, 2022, the department, with assistance from the work group, must provide a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature on approaches to continue this pilot project in the 2023-2025 fiscal biennium.

(d) By June 30, 2023, the department, with assistance from the nonprofit organization that co-convened the work group, shall provide a report to the legislature describing the success and shortcomings of the lifeline support system, as well as other data such as request-for-service conclusions and the demographics of beneficiaries. The report must include a recommendation for how the state can permanently establish the lifeline.

Project activities and timeline

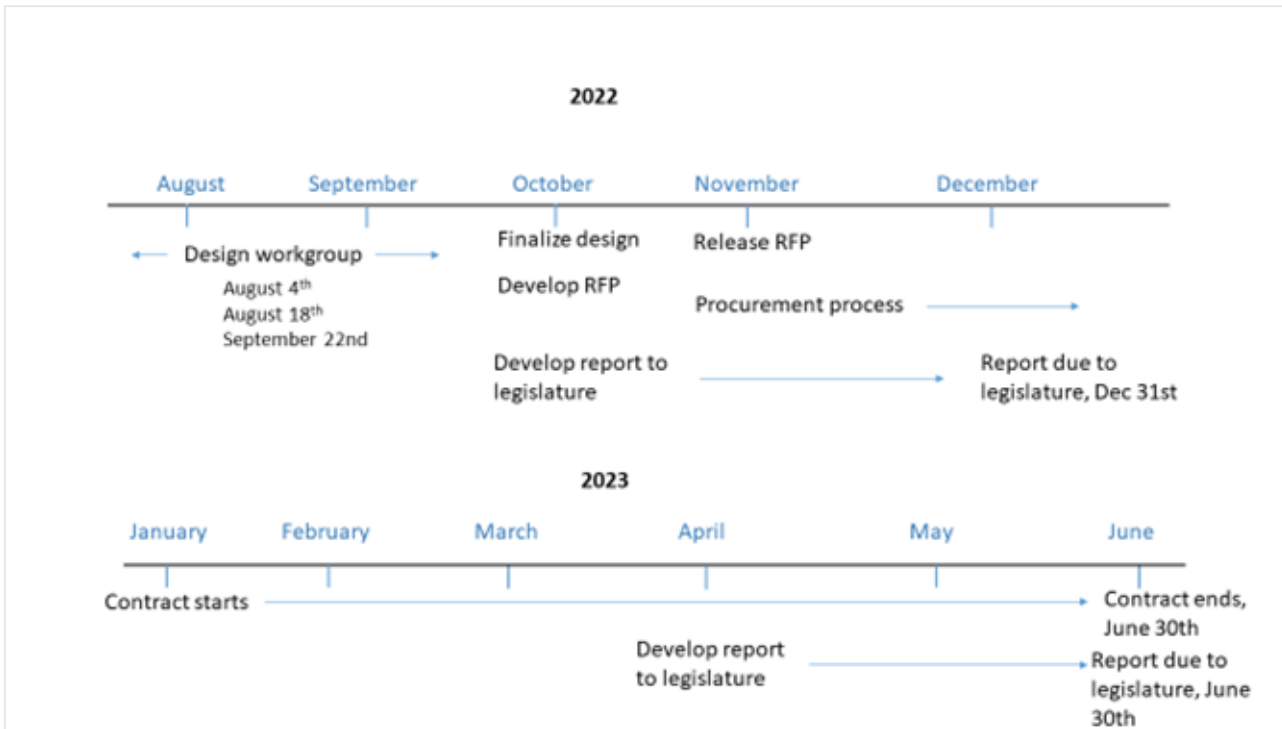
The implementation of the proviso involves multiple phases:

- 1) Identification of a nonprofit organization to co-convene a work group to design the Lifeline Support Services pilot.
- 2) Convene the design work group beginning by Aug. 31, 2022, and have a final design developed by Oct. 31, 2022.
- 3) Conduct a competitive procurement process to select an entity to implement the Lifeline pilot program from January 1 to June 30, 2023.
- 4) Submit a report to the Legislature by Dec. 31, 2022, on approaches to continue the pilot project in the 2023-2025 fiscal biennium.

- 5) Collect data and evaluate the pilot program throughout the contract term of January 1 to June 30, 2023.
- 6) Submit a report to the Legislature by June 30, 2023, describing the success and shortcomings of the lifeline support system, as well as other data such as request-for-service conclusions and the demographics of beneficiaries. The report must include a recommendation for how the state can permanently establish the lifeline.

The Office of Homeless Youth developed the following timeline to carry out the activities directed within the budget proviso.

Figure 1: Project timeline



Design work group

The Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) partnered with NorthStar Advocates and SDM Consulting to convene and facilitate the design work group in a tri-chair model.¹ The work group met three times over August and September to develop a design framework for implementing the Lifeline Support System pilot project. An additional meeting was held with only the lived experts of the work group in August.

The work group consisted of young people with lived experience with housing instability and/or public system involvement, homeless service providers, operators of crisis hotlines, staff with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, and others. A full list of attendees is in the [Acknowledgements](#) section of this report. Lived experts were paid a stipend for their participation in the work group.

Landscape analysis

During the first meeting of the design work group, a landscape analysis was introduced to take stock of existing hotlines, access points, and portals for individuals in Washington to access a variety of support and services, including mental health counseling, crisis support, housing services, health care, basic needs, peer support, and others. The work group contributed to expanding this landscape analysis and developed a foundational understanding of what currently exists in the state. The [landscape analysis is available online](#).

Prioritizing and scoping the pilot

The legislative proviso articulates a broad vision for the Lifeline Support System to serve a wide range of populations. For the implementation of the initial pilot, the design work group assessed feasibility, recognizing the limitations of funding and timelines to fully realize the large vision in the short term. The design work group engaged in large and small group discussions, interactive activities, and a feasibility assessment to develop a set of priorities and critical design elements to scope the pilot project.

These exercises were intended to create clarity and direction on where the pilot should be focused while acknowledging the need for the pilot to serve as a no-wrong-door access point for anyone in Washington who has experienced or is at risk of entering public systems of care.

This pilot is intended to implement the priorities identified by the design work group over six months. The outcomes and experiences will inform future design and potential investments in the Lifeline Support System by the Legislature.

The work group focused on priorities across two main domains:

1. Defining the target population, including age, and deciding whether to focus on those at risk of entering public systems, people currently being served by public systems, or those who have exited public systems.
2. Services offered through the Lifeline.

¹ Commerce contracted with NorthStar Advocates for \$40,000 to serve as the partner non-profit. The contract restricted NorthStar Advocates from applying for the Lifeline pilot funds. This restriction is not extended to SDM Consulting, which offered its support for this process on a volunteer basis and was not involved in the development of the Request for Proposals.

Resulting priorities identified for the Lifeline pilot

Target population

The design work group identified the target population for the pilot as individuals who are *exiting* or have *exited* public systems of care, including foster care, the juvenile justice system, OHY prevention and protection shelter and housing programs, and inpatient behavioral health treatment.

While anyone who accesses the Lifeline is expected to be served, the target population will receive more extensive case support and resources (such as flex funds). In contrast, those outside the target population will receive a less resource-intensive approach.

Critical design elements:

- Serve as a one-stop access point for any services needed. Service needs are defined by those accessing the Lifeline.
- The intent is not to reinvent the wheel but to complement other existing hotlines and services and meet youth and young adults' unique needs.
- Lifeline should focus on filling gaps where other hotlines/services are not meeting needs.
- Lifeline should be relational, not simply a referral line.
- Lifeline should connect recipients to engagement opportunities through advisory boards and advocacy groups, where applicable.
- Utilize peer navigators, emphasizing those with lived experience to staff the Lifeline.
- Adopt an approach of case completion in which a case is not closed until it is resolved. This entails making reasonable efforts to connect individuals to services and following up to ensure needs were met while providing support.
- Outreach and advertising/marketing should be a significant focus. Young people and adult professionals shared multiple times that they were unaware of many existing resources. The Lifeline resource must utilize multiple approaches to make people aware of it, including:
 - Outreach to trusted partners (peers, schools, libraries, organizations, and agencies that work with youth)
 - A website with search engine optimization
 - Social media
 - Potential mobile app
- Services provided via Lifeline should include the following:
 - Flex funding that is quickly deployed to meet immediate needs. Flex funding may be prioritized for the identified target population
 - Navigation of regional/statewide resources
 - Use of peers to staff the Lifeline
 - The case is not closed until it is resolved (case completion)

These priorities were included within the Request for Proposals (RFP), and applicants were assessed on their ability to implement a pilot in alignment with these priorities.

There were additional design elements prioritized by the work group. These were included in the RFP as program requirements, because they were also identified as required elements of the Lifeline Support System pilot in the legislative proviso. Those include:

- **Scope:** Lifeline must be a statewide resource designed to serve anyone in Washington. Applicants are not required to have a statewide scope but must be able to provide access to anyone in the state.
- **Flexible funding:** A portion of the grant must be used to provide flexible funding when an existing resource cannot be identified to resolve a beneficiary need. Flex funds can be used for a wide range of supports, such as transportation, car repair, rental application fees, etc.
- **Partnerships:** Must partner with state agencies, federally recognized tribes, counties, and community-based providers.
- **Data and evaluation:** Data must be collected on the demographics and service needs of all who access the Lifeline. The evaluation must include successes and shortcomings of the pilot project and customer feedback from those who have accessed the Lifeline.

Recommendations

The legislative proviso in Chapter 297, Laws of 2022 requires Commerce, with assistance from the work group, to provide a report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature on approaches to continue the Lifeline pilot project in the 2023-2025 fiscal biennium. The recommendations are as follows:

Extend pilot an additional two years

The 2023 fiscal year has provided time for a work group to be developed to design the Lifeline Support System pilot and for funding to be competitively awarded to an entity to operate the pilot for six months. However, six months is insufficient to build infrastructure, train staff, conduct outreach and marketing, and have enough information to adequately evaluate the program.

The Office of Homeless Youth recommends extending the pilot for two more years through the 2023-25 biennium. Continuing the pilot at the current level of funding (\$750,000 per fiscal year) would allow the pilot to continue in its current iteration. Increasing the level of funding would allow for the pilot to broaden its scope to serve more people beyond the target population identified by the work group for the pilot, bringing the project into better alignment with the proviso as currently written.

Extending the timeline of the pilot will allow for continued evaluation. Based on the learnings from the evaluation, we anticipate modifications and improvements to be made within the pilot and that additional recommendations may be made to the Legislature for the 2024 supplemental budget.

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The design work group addressed the ambiguity of the project's scope by assessing feasibility and identifying priorities and target populations.