

HB 1247 -- TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES

SPONSOR: Sater

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Committee on Healthcare Transformation by a vote of 6 to 4 with 1 present.

By October 28, 2010, this bill requires the Department of Social Services to apply for a federal waiver from the United States Department of Health and Human Services to modify the eligibility requirements for the Missouri Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program to:

(1) Reduce the lifetime eligibility limits for recipients from five years to two years and require beneficiaries subject to any work requirements to be employed at the time of receiving any TANF benefits;

(2) Establish a cash diversion program for unemployed applicants whose TANF benefits are subject to work requirements. The department must offer job assistance services for up to three months to unemployed applicants; and if the applicant is using the services, he or she will be eligible to receive up to three monthly payments equal to the amount the applicant would be eligible to receive if he or she was a TANF recipient; and

(3) Establish a cap on TANF cash benefits for a recipient that is based on the number of children in the recipient's family. Additional cash benefits will not be awarded to a recipient in the event of a child's birth after an initial award has been granted, except if a child is born as a result of rape or incest. The department must offer family planning services to all TANF cash benefit recipients.

FISCAL NOTE: Estimated Cost on General Revenue Fund of \$376,376 to Unknown in FY 2011, Unknown in FY 2012, and Unknown in FY 2013. No impact on Other State Funds in FY 2011, FY 2012, and FY 2013.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the bill stipulates a work requirement in order for a person to be eligible to receive TANF benefits, and the benefit caps encourage work participation for eligible mothers. The bill is similar to proposals in other states and is a step in reforming a program that is in need of changes.

Testifying for the bill was Representative Sater.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that although there are areas of the program that could be more efficient, cutting

benefits is not in the best interest of the persons who need the support of the TANF Program. There are a lot of ways to reward individuals who work, but threatening to cut benefits because a person is not working is very detrimental to families who are already struggling. The family cap should not be used to motivate individuals to find work. Adding a work requirement in a poor economy will result in a program that will never give help to those that need it most. TANF recipients are not trying to work the system. The intent of the bill goes against the goal of the program and proposes a reform measure that will hurt instead of help recipients become financially stable.

Testifying against the bill were Missouri Catholic Conference; and Catholic Charities Archdiocese of St. Louis.