

CCS HCS SS#2 SCS SB 24 -- STRENGTHENING MISSOURI FAMILIES ACT

(Vetoed by the Governor -- Overridden by the General Assembly)

This bill establishes the Strengthening Missouri Families Act that modifies provisions of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The bill requires the Department of Social Services to conduct an investigation and determine if an individual is cooperating with a work activity requirement under the TANF Program. If he or she is non-compliant, a representative of the department must conduct a face-to-face meeting and explain the potential sanction of TANF benefits, as well as the requirements to cure a sanction. The TANF recipient must then have six weeks to comply with the work activity requirement. Failure to do so will result in a sanction consisting of a 50% reduction of benefits for a maximum of 10 weeks. During the period of sanctions, the person must remain on the caseload in sanction status and a representative of the department must attempt to meet face-to-face with the person to explain the existing sanction and the requirements to cure the sanction. To cure a sanction, he or she must perform work activities for a minimum average of 30 hours per week for one month. If the individual does not cure the sanction, the case must be closed. The bill allows for him or her to return to the program by completing work activities for a minimum average of 30 hours per week within one month of the eligibility interview. This provision does not prohibit the state from providing child care or any other related social or support services for a person who is eligible for financial assistance but to whom that assistance is not paid because of the person's failure to cooperate with the work activity. When a TANF recipient marries, the new spouse's income and assets must be disregarded for six consecutive months and the disregard must be a once-in-a-lifetime benefit for the recipient.

Beginning January 1, 2016, the following changes must be made to the TANF Program:

(1) The life-time limit for TANF must be 45 months instead of the current 60 months. This limit must not apply to minors and those families qualifying for a hardship exemption as specified in the bill;

(2) The department must implement a cash diversion program that grants an eligible TANF benefit recipient a lump-sum cash grant for short-term needs, as well as job referrals or referrals to career centers, in lieu of signing up for the long-term monthly cash assistance program upon a showing of good cause as determined by

the department. This lump-sum benefit must not apply toward the life-time TANF benefit limit. Good cause may include loss of employment, excluding voluntarily quitting or a dismissal due to poor job performance or failure to meet a condition of employment; catastrophic illness or accident of a family member that requires an employed recipient to leave employment; a domestic violence incident; or another situation or emergency rendering an employed family member unable to care for the basic needs of the family. The department must set the lump-sum maximum limit at three times the family size allowance for use once in a 12-month period and for only five instances in a lifetime;

(3) The department must develop a standardized program orientation for TANF benefits applicants that informs the applicant of the program's rules and work requirements, as well as the consequences if the work requirements are not met. The department must not issue a case without receiving confirmation that a TANF applicant has undergone the orientation and signed a personal responsibility plan unless the individual is otherwise exempt from the work activity requirements; and

(4) Any parent or caretaker seeking assistance under the program must engage in work activities before becoming eligible for benefits unless he or she is otherwise exempt from the work requirement.

Of the moneys received by the state under the federal TANF block grant during each fiscal year, the Department of Social Services 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 and the Alternatives to Abortion Public Awareness Program; and

(2) Two percent of the moneys to fund healthy marriage promotion activities and activities promoting responsible fatherhood.

The funds must be used to supplement and not supplant other sources of revenue for these programs.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program allows states with a certain level of unemployment to seek a waiver of the work requirement for assistance under the program. Missouri currently has a waiver. Beginning January 1, 2016, the bill specifies that the waiver must no longer apply to individuals seeking benefits in this state. This provision must terminate on January 1, 2019.

Any ongoing savings resulting from the changes to TANF and SNAP

under the bill, subject to appropriations, must be used to provide child care assistance for single parent households, education assistance, transportation assistance, and job training for individuals receiving benefits under the programs as allowable under applicable state and federal law. The department must make an annual report to the Joint Committee on Government Accountability on the progress of implementation of the provisions of the bill, including specified information. The joint committee must meet at least once a year to review the report and make recommendations to the President Pro-Tem of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.