

HCS SS#2 SCS SB 24 -- NONMEDICAL PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

SPONSOR: Sater

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, known as the Strengthening Missouri Families Act, 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. 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 reapply for benefits by completing work activities for a minimum average of 30 hours per week within one month of the eligibility interview. 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 30 months. This limit must not apply to minors and those families qualifying for a hardship exemption;
- (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. 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; catastrophic illness; domestic violence; or other emergencies rendering a family

member unable to care for the basic needs of the family. The lump-sum maximum limit must be set at three times the family size allowance and 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 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 signed a participation agreement; and

(4) Any individual seeking benefits will be required to engage in work activities before becoming eligible.

Of the moneys received by the state under the 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 to fund the alternatives to abortion services program and the alternatives to abortion public awareness program; and

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

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program allows states with a certain level of unemployment to seek a waiver of the work requirement for assistance. Missouri currently has a waiver. Beginning January 1, 2016, the bill removes the waiver and reinstates the work requirements. Any savings resulting from the changes to TANF and SNAP under the bill must be used to provide child care assistance for single parents, education assistance, transportation assistance, and job training for individuals receiving benefits under the programs as allowable under law. The Department of Social Services must make an annual report to the Joint Committee on Government Accountability on the progress of implementation and include specified data. 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.

**PROPONENTS:** Supporters say that currently, individuals in Missouri can be eligible for TANF without working. The bill requires participation in work activities for a minimum of 30 hours per week before applying for TANF. The bill provides six weeks to comply after an initial warning of noncompliance. Things like child care assistance and work training are underfunded and the TANF block

grant money savings could be used to better these important programs. The goal is a program that is efficient and gets people back to being self-sufficient and productive citizens. TANF is currently an expenditure of \$217 million from a yearly federal grant and \$128 million from a yearly maintenance of effort expenditure of state funds. The bill strengthens Missouri's welfare program by increasing work participation and reducing the lifetime limit an individual may receive TANF benefits. The bill is a springboard for even more positive reforms in Missouri.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Sater; Heartland Institute; Missouri Catholic Conference; and Campaign Life Missouri.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that the bill presumes people are lazy and don't try to get ahead. People receiving this assistance are working hard and this bill does not address the biggest barriers to employment and success, including job-related barriers like the lack of transportation to work. The limit of lifetime total benefits and punishment of children for lack of proper behavior by parents are the biggest problems in the bill. These programs need continuity in permitting those who need help to get help. Full family sanctions create new barriers to actually being able to work and the lifetime limit decrease hurts those who need assistance most, like individuals suffering from mental health issues. The bill prohibits the department from obtaining the work waivers if needed and ties the state's hands in the future. The legislature needs to put the focus on supporting work activities when spending TANF funds and needs to focus on support and education rather than punishment.

Testifying against the bill was Operation Breakthrough; Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence; and Empower Missouri.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that 22% of children in Missouri live in poverty. In 77 counties the poverty rate for kids is higher than the state poverty percentage. On average, during each month of 2014 TANF served 50,000 children in Missouri and 27% of those children were 0 to 1 year of age. Changes to the program impact very young children and it takes time to address poverty related barriers. The full family sanction would greatly impact children. The face to face meetings would allow TANF participants to better understand the comprehensive services available to them.

Testifying on the bill was the Missouri Children's Leadership Council.