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HOUSE BILL 1988

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State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

By Representatives Simmons and Couture; by request of Department of Social and Health Services

Prefiled 12/20/23.

1 AN ACT Relating to enhancing poverty reduction, equity, and  
2 access efforts by establishing the customer voice council and  
3 strengthening community partnerships; and amending RCW 74.08A.280.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 **Sec. 1.** RCW 74.08A.280 and 1997 c 58 s 315 are each amended to  
6 read as follows:

7 (1) ~~The legislature finds that ((moving those eligible for~~  
8 ~~assistance to self-sustaining employment is a goal of the WorkFirst~~  
9 ~~program. It is the intent of WorkFirst to aid a participant's~~  
10 ~~progress to self-sufficiency by allowing flexibility within the~~  
11 ~~statewide program to reflect community resources, the local~~  
12 ~~characteristics of the labor market, and the composition of the~~  
13 ~~caseload. Program success will be enhanced through effective~~  
14 ~~coordination at regional and local levels, involving employers, labor~~  
15 ~~representatives, educators, community leaders, local governments,~~  
16 ~~and)) assisting those experiencing poverty to obtain and maintain  
17 stability, self-sustaining employment, and well-being are goals of  
18 public assistance programs and a key part of poverty reduction  
19 efforts. State poverty reduction efforts intend to effectively aid  
20 families and individuals with low incomes to thrive by allowing  
21 flexibility within the statewide program to reflect community~~

1 resources, the local characteristics of the labor market, and the  
2 expressed needs of those experiencing poverty. Success in reducing  
3 poverty, and the disparate impact of chronic and intergenerational  
4 poverty on particular demographic groups, will be enhanced by:

5 (a) A structure to seek and use the voice of those who use or  
6 have used public assistance to shape and evaluate policies and  
7 practices; and

8 (b) Collaboration and coordination at regional and local levels,  
9 involving employers; labor representatives; educators; community  
10 leaders; local and tribal governments; and behavioral health,  
11 housing, early learning, transportation, and other social service  
12 providers.

13 (2) Effective July 1, 2025, the department shall establish a  
14 statewide public assistance customer voice council and provide  
15 staffing and training to support the council. Members shall be  
16 current or former recipients of state public assistance and shall be  
17 compensated as allowed under RCW 43.03.220. The department shall  
18 consult with the following in setting policies and membership for the  
19 customer voice council:

20 (a) The legislative-executive WorkFirst poverty reduction  
21 oversight task force established under RCW 74.08A.505;

22 (b) The intergenerational poverty advisory committee created  
23 under RCW 74.08A.510; and

24 (c) Local community partnership groups established under  
25 subsection (4) of this section.

26 (3) The department, through its regional and community service  
27 offices, shall collaborate, based on community need, with employers,  
28 current and former public assistance recipients, frontline workers,  
29 educational institutions, labor, (~~(private industry councils,~~)  
30 workforce training and education coordinating board, (~~(community~~  
31 rehabilitation employment programs)) workforce development councils,  
32 employment and training agencies, local governments, the employment  
33 security department, organizations serving refugees and immigrants,  
34 and community action agencies to develop work programs and public  
35 assistance services that are effective and work in their communities.  
36 For planning purposes, the department shall collect and make  
37 accessible to regional offices and local community partnership groups  
38 authorized under subsection (4) of this section, successful work and  
39 public assistance program models from around the United States(~~(~~  
40 including the employment partnership program, apprenticeship

1 ~~programs, microcredit, microenterprise, self-employment, and W-2~~  
2 ~~Wisconsin works~~). Work programs shall incorporate local (~~volunteer~~  
3 ~~citizens~~) residents in their planning and implementation phases to  
4 ensure community relevance and success.

5 ~~((3))~~ (4) The department shall ensure that local community  
6 partnership groups are established and provide staffing assistance to  
7 them. Communities may determine the specific structure and  
8 composition of these groups based on community needs and existing  
9 resources for these functions. Local community partnership groups  
10 shall meet at least quarterly and shall:

11 (a) Elevate customer voices in the development and evaluation of  
12 local public assistance practices, providing experience to support  
13 participation in the customer voice council established in subsection  
14 (2) of this section;

15 (b) Promote effective communication and collaboration among the  
16 department's local community service offices, people with experience  
17 living in poverty, local governments, community action agencies, and  
18 other service providers;

19 (c) Advise and comment on department program policies;

20 (d) Work to resolve local issues including client referral and  
21 service gaps;

22 (e) Review local data and racial, ethnic, and other  
23 disproportionality trends;

24 (f) Review public assistance client feedback;

25 (g) Propose innovative and evidence-based collaborative services;  
26 and

27 (h) Provide input for the plans developed under subsection (7) of  
28 this section.

29 (5) To reduce administrative costs and ~~((to))~~ ensure equal  
30 statewide access to services, the department may develop contracts  
31 for statewide (~~welfare-to-work~~) employment and training services.  
32 These statewide contracts shall support regional flexibility and  
33 ensure that resources follow local labor market opportunities and  
34 recipients' needs.

35 ~~((4))~~ (6) The secretary shall establish WorkFirst service areas  
36 for purposes of planning WorkFirst programs and for distributing  
37 WorkFirst resources. Service areas shall reflect department regions.

38 ~~((5))~~ (7) By July 31st of each odd-numbered year, ~~((a plan for~~  
39 ~~the WorkFirst program shall be developed)~~ beginning in 2025,  
40 community partnership groups shall develop a plan for the local

1 aspects of the WorkFirst program and other poverty reduction efforts  
2 for each region. The plan shall be prepared in consultation with  
3 local and regional sources, (~~adapting the statewide WorkFirst~~  
4 ~~program~~) supporting public assistance service delivery to achieve  
5 maximum effect for (~~the participants~~) program recipients and the  
6 communities within which they reside. Local consultation shall  
7 include to the greatest extent possible input from current or former  
8 WorkFirst participants and other public assistance recipients and  
9 local and regional planning bodies for social services and workforce  
10 development. The regional and local administrator shall consult with  
11 employers of various sizes, labor representatives, training and  
12 education providers, program participants, economic development  
13 organizations, community organizations, tribes, and local governments  
14 in the preparation of the service area plan.

15 ((~~6~~)) (8) The secretary has final authority in plan approval or  
16 modification. Regional program implementation may deviate from the  
17 statewide program if specified in a service area plan, as approved by  
18 the secretary.

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