

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-197

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE.

Vote Date: 3/8/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/1/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This legislation will extend the time limit for individuals receiving Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) benefits from 21 months to 60 months. Additionally, the bill will also make conforming changes to eliminate provisions related to six-month extensions and apply methodology for counting months toward sixty-month limit more broadly to all time-limited TFA recipients. Lastly, this bill will allow the Department of Social Services to terminate benefits for those who fail to comply with an employment services requirement.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language for this bill removes references to TANF extensions. Additionally, only exemptions will only apply to 60-month federal maximum.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Deidre S. Gifford, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services (DSS):

Commissioner Deidre S. Gifford and the Department of Social Services (DSS) are generally opposed to this legislation. As stated in the testimony, the Department, though appreciates the intent of the bill, is unable to support it at this time because the Governor's budget does not allocate funding for such changes. Additionally, outlined in the testimony, the Commissioner states that if Connecticut's average benefit duration would rise to the national average over time, the Department calculated that this change would result in an additional annual cost in the range of \$5 million initially. Overall, the Department is interested in working with the legislature and other program stakeholders work to identify how best to reform the TFA program within available resources.

Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO):

The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO) offers support for the passage of this bill. As stated in their testimony, the Commission believes the proposed time extension granted for recipients to be more appropriate for families to stabilize considering current pandemic-impacted economic conditions.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Susan M. Johnson, State Representative Connecticut General Assembly:

Representative Susan Johnson, who represents the 49th House District, is in favor of this bill. As stated in the Representative's testimony, the TANF 21-month support limitation to needy women and children in Connecticut has caused an increase in our homeless population and homeless children are traumatized by the loss of a place to live. She believes providing more support to impoverished women and children through this bill will help Connecticut children do better in school. As mentioned in the testimony, passage of this bill will help our local communities help impoverished families, mostly women and children, become functional members of our economy extend the TANF program to families for the full 60 months.

Liz Fraser, Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human Services:

Liz Fraser, the Policy Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services, a division of Advancing Connecticut Together, supports this bill with recommendations. The testimony recommends that additional steps should be taken to make TFA a stronger poverty relief program, as well as include the components and supports that will lead to economic self-sufficiency. Ms. Fraser mentions that to achieve this, lapsed funds can be used to provide additional resources to the families the money is intended to assist. Additional background of support was provided in the written testimony.

Laura Hoch, Senior Manager of Advocacy, National Multiple Sclerosis Society:

The National MS Society offers support for the passage of this bill. As stated in the testimony, the National MS Society supports increasing the amount of time a person can qualify for the Temporary Family Assistance program. They argue that for many people impacted by MS, economic security hinges on critical public benefit and support programs, such as the Temporary Family Assistance program. Therefore, they are in favor of extending the length of time a person can receive temporary family assistance as it would go a long way in improving economic security specifically for people living with a chronic illness like MS and generally for the residents of Connecticut.

Stephen Monroe Tomczak, Member, Coordinating Committee Social Welfare Action Alliance, Connecticut Chapter (SWAA-CT):

Stephen Monroe Tomczak, a member of the Coordinating Committee Social Welfare Action Alliance, Connecticut Chapter (SWAA-CT) is in favor of this legislation. As stated in the testimony, Mr. Monroe Tomczak supports this bill because families with children do not have to contend with current extreme time limits as they attempt to improve their lives. For these Connecticut families, he believes this legislation aims to correct an inequity and an injustice which is the excessively short duration of the state's time limit for cash public assistance under the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program.

Alison Weir, Policy Advocate and Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid:

The Greater Hartford Legal Aide supports the passage of this bill with recommendations. As stated in the testimony, at twenty-one months, Connecticut has the second shortest time limit for similar programs in the country, and a far shorter lifetime limit than allowed by federal law or applied in any of our neighboring states. The Greater Hartford Legal Aid argues that this short time limit is a contributing factor to why the program does not reach the people who need the help. The testimony states that the twenty-one months is simply too short a time for many people who have been chronically unemployed or underemployed to find a job and receive the support to ensure success in holding that job, or to receive the training necessary for a job that would ensure self-sufficiency. The Greater Hartford Legal Aid further recommends the deletion of clause two from the lines 320 - 321 in the bill, stating that the special penalty is inconsistent with the “three strikes” method for addressing employment services noncompliance issues during the 60-month period.

Liza Andrews, Director of Public Policy & Communications, CCADV:

CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is in support of this legislation. CCADV, in their testimony, argues that cash assistance has been shown to work as it provides the temporary stable income that allows families to meet basic needs and increase family stability so that securing and maintaining meaningful employment can be the focus. For CCADV, strengthening the TFA program will give families the time they need to achieve self-sufficiency and exit poverty permanently.

Patricia Calvo, Director, Windham Youth Services:

Patricia Calvo, Director, Windham Youth Services supports this bill because according to her, it will provide some stability and allow families to get back on track towards independence.

Isabel Alvarez Diaz, Graduate Student, Department of Social Work, Women's Studies Southern Connecticut State University:

Isabel Alvarez Diaz, a graduate student at Southern Connecticut State University, offer support for this bill. For her, extending the duration of Temporary Family Assistance would be beneficial during times of stress, or a change in circumstances. It may assist those experiencing these hardships a chance to afford healthcare, to support their children’s education, to promote racial equity, to meet basic needs, and to build stability.

Katherine Eves, Willimantic, CT Resident:

Katherine Eves, a Willimantic, CT resident, is in support of this bill. As stated in the testimony, the increasing the number of months people can receive TANF benefits will help more women and their children succeed and remove themselves from poverty.

Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF):

The Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) supports the passage of this legislation. As stated in the testimony, twenty-one months is rarely enough time to address the multiple barriers that often prohibit steady employment. Parents need more time to acquire the skills and education needed to secure a job with livable wages that support their families in the long term.

National Organization for Women CT (NOW CT):

The National Organization for Women CT (NOW CT) supports the passage of this bill. As mentioned in the testimony, NOW CT advocates for a wide range of economic justice supports that if not available can limit women’s and children’s freedom and success such as

Husky and TANF. Women are the majority of the participants in these programs, and so NOW CT needs the CT legislature to support TANF expansion at this stressful time.

Bob Stiepock, NAACP Member:

Bob Stiepock, a NAACP member, is in favor of this legislation. Mr. Stiepock states that an extension of TANF could give Black working mothers some relief and breathing space because the pandemic has been particularly hard on them both in terms of health and work.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None

Reported by: Isaac Agyemang-Duah

Date: 03/16/2022