
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 197

AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE.

SUMMARY

This bill extends the maximum lifetime duration of cash assistance under the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program to 60 months, which is generally the maximum allowed under federal law. Under current law, the program has a 21-month time limit, with up to two six-month extensions.

The bill correspondingly eliminates provisions that allow the Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioner to grant up to two six-month extensions for families who have made a good faith effort to comply with TFA requirements but continue to have low incomes or encounter circumstances preventing employment (e.g., domestic violence). It also eliminates other provisions on (1) eligibility for six-month extensions and a family's right to petition for them and (2) penalties for noncompliance with program requirements during a six-month extension. It makes other conforming changes.

The bill allows, rather than requires, the DSS commissioner to exempt families from the program's time limit under certain circumstances. It additionally allows DSS to exempt families that have encountered circumstances preventing employment.

The bill requires the DSS commissioner to post her notice of intent to adopt regulations on the eRegulations system and the department's website, rather than in the Connecticut Law Journal. By law, she must do so within 20 days of implementing policies and procedures related to TFA.

By law, the Labor Department administers employment services for TFA recipients who are subject to work requirements (CGS § 17b-688i).

These TFA recipients are also eligible for subsidized child care under the Care 4 Kids program (CGS § 17b-749).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2022

EXEMPTIONS FROM TIME LIMIT

Current law requires DSS to exempt families from the program's time limits under certain circumstances. The bill instead allows DSS to exempt a family under the same circumstances. This applies to families with:

1. a needy caretaker relative who is incapacitated or of an advanced age, as defined by the DSS commissioner, if there is no other nonexempt caretaker relative in the household;
2. a needy caretaker relative who is needed in the home because of another household member's incapacitation, if there is no other nonexempt caretaker relative in the household;
3. a caretaker relative who is not legally responsible for the dependent children in the household, if his or her needs are not considered when DSS calculates the TFA benefit and there is no other nonexempt caretaker relative in the household;
4. a caretaker relative caring for a child under the age of one, if there is no other nonexempt caretaker relative in the household;
5. a pregnant or postpartum caretaker relative, if a physician has indicated that she cannot work and there is no other nonexempt caretaker relative in the household;
6. a caretaker relative determined by the DSS commissioner to be unemployable and there is no other nonexempt caretaker relative in the household; and
7. minor parents attending and satisfactorily completing high school or high school equivalency programs.

The bill additionally allows the DSS commissioner to exempt from

the time limits families that have encountered circumstances preventing employment, including domestic violence, physical harm to the family's children, or other circumstances beyond the family's control. Under current law, the commissioner may grant up to two six-month extensions for families encountering these circumstances.

BACKGROUND

Federal Requirements for TANF-Funded Cash Assistance

TFA is Connecticut's cash assistance program for families. TFA is funded through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. For TANF-funded cash assistance programs, the state must describe the program in a state plan that is subject to approval by the Administration of Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. TANF-funded cash assistance programs must meet certain federal requirements, including work participation rates and a 60-month lifetime limit on program benefits. In certain cases, the state may provide more than 60 months of benefits under this program (e.g., to a limited number of families experiencing hardships or by providing benefits with state funds rather than federal funds).

Related Bills

SB 192 (File 215), favorably reported by the Human Services Committee, changes the way DSS calculates penalties for a TFA participant's failure to comply with work requirements, in some cases requiring DSS to reduce benefits rather than temporarily terminating them.

SB 285 (File 220, as amended by Senate Amendment "A") excludes from the time limit months of benefits received during any state public health emergency, rather than only excluding months during a public health emergency declared by Governor Ned Lamont.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference - APP

Yea 13 Nay 7 (03/08/2022)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 36 Nay 12 (04/07/2022)