



S.B. 205

124th General Assembly
(As Introduced)

Sens. Prentiss, DiDonato, Fingerhut, Hagan, Herington, Brady

BILL SUMMARY

- Increases by six months the period of initial eligibility to participate in the Ohio Works First Program.
- Requires the Director of Job and Family Services to declare a six-month moratorium on the time limit for participation in Ohio Works First when the federal government does both of the following: (1) issues a final estimate for a quarter showing that the real gross domestic product (GDP) for that quarter was less than the real GDP for the immediately preceding quarter and (2) for the quarter immediately following that quarter, issues either a preliminary estimate showing that the real GDP was at least 1% less than the real GDP for the immediately preceding quarter or a final estimate showing that the real GDP was any amount less than the real GDP for the immediately preceding quarter.
- Requires the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) to implement a federally authorized exemption to the Food Stamp Program's work requirement.
- Requires that ODJFS submit reports to the General Assembly on the implementation of the bill's provision regarding the Food Stamp Program's work requirements.

CONTENT AND OPERATION

OHIO WORKS FIRST

The Ohio Works First Program is a time-limited, income maintenance program for low-income families with children that is operated with federal, state, and county funds. On the federal level, Ohio Works First is known as Temporary

Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). It is authorized by Title IV-A of the Social Security Act.

Time limit changes

(sec. 5107.18)

Federal TANF law requires, with certain exceptions, that states deny assistance under TANF to families that include an adult who has received aid under any state TANF program funded with federal funds for 60 months.¹ This restriction applies whether or not the assistance was received in consecutive months. States may use state funds, however, to provide benefits to children or families after the time limit makes them ineligible to receive federal TANF funds.

The Ohio Works First Program divides the 60-month time limit into three components: a 36-month period of initial eligibility, then 24 months of ineligibility, and, finally, 24 months of possible additional eligibility. For an assistance group to be eligible for the additional 24 months of eligibility, a county department of job and family services must determine that good cause exists.² Good cause may include losing employment, inability to find employment, divorce, domestic violence considerations, and unique personal circumstances. The assistance group must provide the county department verification acceptable to the county department of whether any members of the assistance group had employment during the period the assistance group was not participating in Ohio Works First and the amount and sources of the assistance group's income during that period. If the county department is satisfied that good cause exists, the assistance group may reapply to participate in Ohio Works First for 24 additional months.

The bill adjusts two of the three components to the 60-month time limit. The bill increases the 36-month period of initial eligibility to 42 months and reduces the period of possible additional eligibility to 18 months.

¹ *An example of an exception is that the number of months an individual receives TANF while a minor and not the head of a household or married to the head of a household is not counted toward the time limit when the individual becomes pregnant or a parent.*

² *An "assistance group" is a family or other group of individuals treated as a unit for purposes of determining eligibility for and the amount of assistance provided under Ohio Works First.*

Time limit moratorium

(sec. 5107.181)

The bill establishes a new exception to OWF's eligibility time limit. The exception is based on the nation's real gross domestic product (GDP) as measured by the Bureau of Economic Analysis in the United States Department of Commerce.³ The Bureau measures the real GDP for each calendar quarter and issues an advance, preliminary, and final estimate of the real GDP for each quarter. The advance estimate is issued in the first month following the quarter for which the estimate is made. The preliminary estimate is issued one month later. The final estimate is issued in the third month following the quarter for which the estimate is made.

The Director of Job and Family Services is required by the bill to declare a six-month moratorium on the time limit when the Bureau does both of the following:

(1) Issues a final estimate for a quarter showing that the real GDP for that quarter was less than the real GDP for the immediately preceding quarter;

(2) For the quarter immediately following that quarter, issues either a preliminary estimate showing that the real GDP was at least 1% less than the real GDP for the immediately preceding quarter or a final estimate showing that the real GDP was any amount less than the real GDP for the immediately preceding quarter.

A moratorium is to begin the month immediately following the month in which the second of the two conditions for issuing the moratorium occurs. No month in which a moratorium is in effect applies toward the Ohio Works First time limit. An assistance group that would be eligible to participate in Ohio Works First if not for the time limit is eligible to participate while the moratorium is in effect.

The bill provides that, if an assistance group, because of a moratorium, participates in Ohio Works First for more months than the time limit would otherwise permit, only state and county funds are to be used to pay for the Ohio Works First benefits provided the assistance group for those months.

³ *GDP is the market value of all final goods and services produced by resources located in the United States, regardless of who owns those resources. Real GDP is the value of GDP measured in terms of dollars of fixed purchasing power.*

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

The Food Stamp Program is a federal program administered by ODJFS and county departments of job and family services. It is designed to raise the nutritional levels of low-income individuals and families.

Food Stamp Program work requirements

(sec. 5101.541)

Under federal law governing the Food Stamp Program, no physically and mentally fit individual age 18 to 50 is eligible for food stamp benefits if, during the preceding 36-month period, the individual received food stamp benefits for not less than three months during which the individual failed to (1) work at least 20 hours per week, averaged monthly, (2) participate in and comply with the requirements of a work program for 20 hours or more per week, or (3) participate in and comply with the requirements of a workfare program. The federal law provides certain exceptions to this work requirement.

One of the exceptions is that a state may request that the United States Secretary of Agriculture waive the applicability of the work requirement to any group of individuals in the state if the Secretary makes a determination that the area in which the individuals reside has an unemployment rate of over 10% or does not have a sufficient number of jobs to provide employment for the individuals. The bill requires ODJFS to request the waiver and, on receipt of the waiver, to implement it.

ODJFS is required by the bill to submit reports to the President and Minority Leader of the Senate and Speaker and Minority Leader of the House of Representatives on the waiver's implementation. The reports are due not later than six months after implementation of the waiver and on a quarterly basis thereafter. Reports must include profiles, including age and income, of food stamp benefit recipients affected by the waiver. The Senate President and House Speaker are required to notify each of the members of their chambers on receipt of a report.

HISTORY

ACTION	DATE	JOURNAL ENTRY
Introduced	12-05-01	p. 1242

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