

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6520

AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROVISION OF TEMPORARY STATE SERVICES

Title: TO VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

Vote Date: 3/18/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/4/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill acknowledges the challenges faced by victims of domestic violence and provides temporary state assistance, regardless of household income. Programs, such as supplemental nutrition assistance, are offered to these victims as well as enhanced income standards and improved eligibility to help overcome these challenges.

Substitute language has been proposed to waive income standards for 90 days. Included in the waiver of income standards, when determining eligibility, is language that does not count the income of a spouse, domestic partner or other household member credibly accused of domestic violence. This bill would assist people who leave households where they have experienced abuse, as they often do not have access to the household's income or assets.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Deidre Gifford, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Social Services

While appreciating the intent of the Bill, the Department has some reservations about the language and is concerned that it conflicts with Federal Law. The Bill is intended to expedite SNAP eligibility determinations for victims of domestic violence and to provide SNAP benefits for not less than 90 days before re-determining eligibility for benefits and, when conducting an expedited initial eligibility determination, to subtract from such victim's household income the income of any spouse, domestic partner or other household member credibly accused by such victim of domestic violence.

Pursuant to Federal regulations, the only individuals that qualify for expedited processing of SNAP applications are those (1) with less than \$150 in income per month and less than \$100 in liquid assets; (2) whose combined monthly gross income and liquid assets are less than their rent/mortgage and utilities; or (3) who are destitute migrant/seasonal farmworkers that possess less than \$100 in liquid assets.

Section 3 of the bill proposes to exclude an alleged abuser's income when a domestic violence victim applies for SAGA assistance. The Department notes that the new language does not distinguish between situations where the victim of domestic violence is living with the person accused of domestic violence.

Given this background, if the committee is still interested in pursuing this legislation, the Department is open to working with the committee to draft language that could address scenarios where a victim still lives with the alleged abuser. The Department recommends that existing program eligibility rules and processes related to applications and renewals be leveraged to the extent possible in order to minimize administrative and systems costs, while also ensuring that the income and assets of an alleged abuser living with a victim are excluded from the eligibility determination.

Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood

Victims of domestic violence are living in an extremely vulnerable situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated family situations, particularly where domestic violence is present. Childcare provides a parent peace of mind that their child is in a safe and stable place. This bill would require that any person who applies for Care 4 Kids and has stated that they are a victim of domestic violence, in accordance with 17b-112a, income standards for determining eligibility is waived for at least 90 days, at which point income would be determined.

The language in SB 6520, as written, raises questions about how the Office of Early Childhood would be able to make a determination whether an individual is a victim of domestic violence. There is concern that our agency does not have the expertise or resources to make that determination. We would be happy to further discuss this area of our concern.

This bill has significant fiscal implications. As the necessary fiscal resources are not included in the Governor's budget proposal, the OEC cannot support the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kelly Anelli, Director of Member Organization Services, Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

This bill provides critical economic justice for victims of domestic violence. Section one of this bill would expedite access to SNAP benefits for victims of domestic violence and provide temporary benefits for not less than ninety days before redetermining eligibility.

Financial abuse is commonly misunderstood but is one of the most powerful methods of keeping a victim trapped in an abusive relationship and diminishes their ability to stay safe after leaving.

Allowing victims of domestic violence quicker and easier access to SNAP, Care 4 Kids, and cash assistance temporarily will give them essential support while attempting to end an abusive relationship. It can keep the victim dependent on the abuser if they are unable to access state benefits. Victims may be denied benefits because the abuser's income is too

high. By not including the income of their abuser as part of their household income, survivors can apply for and start receiving benefits for themselves and their children while they are still in the home with their abuser.

The House Republican Caucus

This bill fast tracks the application process for victims seeking temporary benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), SAGA Cash Assistance, and the Care-4-Kids program. Currently, in family units where the abuser is the sole income earner or earns income above the qualifying thresholds, victims find it difficult to financially detach themselves from their abusers out of fear of not having the financial resources needed to meet their basic living needs. House Bill 6520 will address this issue by excluding the income of the abuser from the SNAP, SAGA and Care-4-Kids programs and offering victims 90 days of temporary benefits as they try to move on with their lives.

We suggest that the bill be amended to ensure that temporary benefits are provided to victims who demonstrate intent to live apart from the abuser.

Susan Divietro, PhD., Research Scientist at the Injury Prevention Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated school closures, job losses, spikes in behavioral health problems and substance misuse, and dramatic social isolation, has caused surges in domestic violence and has created additional barriers for victims of violence to seek help. Financial entanglements make leaving relationships extremely difficult even in the best of times.

Victims of domestic violence desperately need this assistance. Nutritional assistance, cash transfers, and childcare subsidies can dramatically improve the lives of victims of domestic violence and their children. Victims need real choices as they navigate their relationships and try to keep themselves and their children safe, particularly given the uncertainty and anxiety of our current time.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed

Reported by: David Rackliffe

Date: April 5, 2021