

Minutes (for review and confirmation at next quarterly meeting, August 2019)

I. Welcome and Introductions

Meeting convened by Senator Hans Zeiger and Dept. of Social and Health Services Secretary Cheryl Strange

Quorum met by task force members (or designee) in attendance as follows:

Jim Baumgart, Sen. Jeannie Darneille, Sen. Manka Dhingra, Erin Frasier, Rep. Mia Gregerson, James Harms, Diane Klontz, Haley Lowe (for Mona Johnson), Nam Nguyen, Daisye Orr, Maria Siguenza, Cheryl Strange, Sen. Maureen Walsh, Sen. Hans Zeiger.

Additional attendees:

Michael Althausser, Jennifer Bereskin, Cecil Daniels, Dawn Eychaner, Sarah Garcia, Susan Kavanaugh, Alexis Marx, Alison Mendiola, Anna Minor, Lori Pfingst, Babs Roberts, Suzy Young.

II. Task Force Business

Senator Zeiger

a. Confirm prior meeting minutes

- *Minutes confirmed as written.*

III. TANF/WorkFirst

Babs Roberts

a. Post-session review of TANF/WF funding

- The budget funded implementation of 2SHB 1603.
- Additional *home visiting* funds in DCYF budget.
- TANF is not back to pre-recession levels but 2SHB 1603 makes progress in that direction.
Senator Walsh is interested in data showing caseload numbers alongside funding cuts during the recession. These funding cuts were achieved by policy changes resulting in caseload reductions. The program today reaches less families in poverty than it did prior to the recession.
- 2SHB 1893 provides emergency help to students to remain enrolled in college and aims to increase student access to Basic Food.
- Grant increase for the Pregnant Women Assistance program bringing the maximum in line with the one-person TANF grant maximum (\$363.00 monthly).

- Decreased funding for WorkFirst services, but transportation initiative and Working Family Support are continued. Senator Walsh inquired about how the Department evaluates the reason that families return to the TANF program and whether the case management approach changes when families return. There is some evaluation, but the reason for return is not always clear. The Department is heading in the direction of evaluating within the context of the larger issue of poverty to support all families and engage in a more effective, person-centered way. Efforts are underway as the Transforming Case Management project proceeds within the Community Services Division (CSD).
- Increased funding for homeless services in Commerce budget. Diane Klontz shared that this will support a robust plan to decrease homelessness that focuses on housing the unsheltered. Strategic investments in affordable housing and wraparound services.
- Additional investments in HCA budget to address issues of substance use disorder and mental health.

b. Working Family Support program cap

- The program has a household cap that has not been reached. Opportunity to increase the benefit to provide more dollars to help families purchase food items. Considering a change from the current monthly rate of \$10.00 per month to \$15.00 per month. This benefit does count against the food assistance, but represents an overall net gain for families.
- Senators Walsh and Darneille want to avoid adding a disproportionate administrative burden/cost for a modest increase. This increase would not represent much of an added burden as it is well supported by electronic/automated solutions. Jennifer Bereskin shared from her personal experience that every little bit helps when you are struggling to get by. Discussion on FTEs to determine eligibility and whether staffing is trimmed when caseloads decrease. Currently no formula to adjust workforce vs. caseload and this is common across social service agencies. CSD would like to shift any staff capacity towards serving customers in a more effective and meaningful way by using a coaching model. Though we can't control federal requirements, Senator Darneille favors reducing bureaucracy to receive state-funded benefits as much as possible.
- Though Working Family Support is a small program, its effect on state Maintenance of Effort, Work Participation Rate, and Caseload Reduction Credit is important to maintain compliance with federal requirements. The desire is to move away from a "compliance" model to case

management that produces better outcomes, however current federal measures are not outcome-based but instead focus on amount of participation.

- Senator Zeiger inquired about current staffing needs. There is a need to increase capacity to provide meaningful case management. Considering shifting eligibility staff to case management role.
- Senator Walsh asked whether the current application flags addiction issues. This is not specifically on the application. We may not know unless the person self-discloses and would be referred to resources. Cash assistance provides case management, which includes screening and addressing addiction issues. The hope is to expand case management beyond cash programs. TANF is a program that is known to divert families from homelessness which can stabilize families enough to begin working on mental health and substance use issues.
- Senator Zeiger asked if there are other options for these funds. Other options for shifting program funds around to be more meaningful for families can be considered. The hope of increasing WFS is to make it a more meaningful benefit beyond the current \$7.00 net gain.

c. Update on TANF time limit disproportionality and action plan

- Issue background: data pulled around TANF time limit extensions (TLE) showed a disproportionate amount of denials for Black and Native American population. A plan to address this concerning disproportionality is in progress. Additional data is being pulled and analyzed to get at the root causes of the disproportionality. Looking at conscious or unconscious bias, or bias occurring in the policy itself, etc. and how this can be addressed.
- A spot review of limited sample of cases has been completed. This review found that procedural errors were made in several cases. Refresher training and increased supervisory oversight around TLE denials initiated. Errors were corrected in the cases that were reviewed, but not all cases were included in the limited sample review. Administrative hearing process or reapplication are options.
- Time limit extension reviews will be moved up to begin the process earlier with families who are nearing their time-limit.
- Plan to review the time-limit policy using a tool to analyze the policy for bias from a lens of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Senator Walsh asked if there is a disproportionality in the staff. It is possible that disproportionality in staffing exists. Moving forward in the Transforming Case Management project, foundational training for staff will include

information on empathy, privilege, conscious and unconscious bias, root causes of poverty, etc. There is interest from other state agency partners in having an opportunity for staff across agencies to receive this training. Agreement that this training would be a beneficial investment across all agency staff that serve the same people.

- Jennifer Bereskin suggests more focus on removing limitations in the systems so there is improved interaction between services and programs. Create more opportunity to incorporate expertise of the client perspective. Look at investment and development of program recipients so they can work in human services and bring their experience with them.
- Senator Walsh asked what the most common TLE denial reason. Most are denied for not meeting extension criteria, they must prove incapacity. Senator Walsh asked how we can get people the skills they need to move off the program into work within the five year limit. There are issues of intergenerational poverty to consider as well as barriers and obstacles such as mental health, addiction, etc. Living in scarcity as a child can affect brain patterns. TANF can provide stability. Strength-based supports are needed to connect people with the most impactful supports and programs for them.
 - 54% of TANF population are one-time recipients
 - 40% of TANF population cycle on and off
 - 6% of TANF population remain on the program indefinitely
- Interest in information on whether the 54% above move to other programs (SSI, etc.) and also the rates of Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) population successful SSI transition. There are SSI facilitators for TANF and ABD program recipients.
- Eligibility for Basic Food is more expansive than TANF, so many remain on Basic Food after exiting TANF. Would like to continue case management support by extending this as an option for Basic Food recipients. There are some resources for mentorship/case management through DCYF, Head Start, ECEAP, and Community Jobs.
- Once someone exits TANF the only transitional support is Transitional Food Assistance (TFA), there is no other graduated drop-off in benefits at this time. Lack of graduated exit from programs can make families feel like they are back in crisis mode just as they were reaching a point of stability.
- Rents have gone up 60% since 2007, contributing factor to families' economic instability. Representative Gregerson is interested in Commerce data on rent increase by specific

region/district. This information can be accessed on the Commerce website, and Tedd Kelleher with Commerce also has a great presentation on this topic. Possible future agenda item. Interest in data on how far people are commuting to get to minimum wage job and information on which area(s) of the state where families are cost-burdened, meaning can't afford cost of living with a full-time, minimum wage job.

IV. Strategic Plan

- DSHS is responsible for drafting a five-year strategic plan due 12/01/2019. The Governor's Poverty Reduction Workgroup has been working on a ten-year plan due at the same time. They have laid a lot of groundwork around root causes and themes, informed by people with direct experience with living in poverty. This work has been done with a focus on EDI, facilitated by an expert consultant.
- Focus on identifying areas where the plans can align or complement each other. The five-year plan should incorporate the recommendations from the ten-year plan that relate to TANF and issues of intergenerational poverty. The group had no concerns with this approach to developing the five-year plan.

V. Results Washington Presentation

- This presentation was previously shared with the Governor and agency secretaries and was well received with an outpouring of support for this work.
- Too many Washingtonians (1 in 4) are living in poverty. This is the same as pre-recession levels. The current system does not produce the results we want to see. People-centered services that work together seamlessly to support families are the answer.
- Jennifer Bereskin shared her personal experience trying to successfully navigate various support systems and programs (education/financial-aid, social services, housing, unemployment, etc.) that often had conflicting eligibility requirements. She advocates for more alignment in program rules, graduated exits from benefits to maintain stability, revision of policies to be more accessible (such as extended business hours to accommodate work schedules), and streamlined processes.
- Agency staff don't necessarily have time to help with navigating various systems and making connections outside of what their own agency provides. There is a need to allow more time with people to help them reach successful outcomes. More cross-agency collaboration to break down silos is needed.
- Need to strike a balance between burdensome verification requirements and accountability of tax dollars and program integrity.

VI. Public Comment

- Josephine Tamayo Murray – Catholic Community Services of Western Washington: Shared the hope that strategic recommendations coming out of the poverty-reduction groups will promote real change by tackling the crucial issue of institutional racism in our systems (welfare, education, criminal justice, etc.).

VII. Wrap up

- Senator Zeiger mentioned that the legislation establishing the TaskForce contains specific tasks that should be considered in composing the five-year plan. Some of these are carryover from the previous iteration of the group.
- Senator Walsh is interested in recommendations that can be converted to policy rather than a "report". Representative Gregerson suggested a roll-out strategy that can build upon work

from prior years, complete solid background work for bills in the interim, schedule work sessions on the issues to educate members, invite fellow legislative colleagues to attend the meetings. Senator Darnielle explained the importance of framing the message in a productive way.