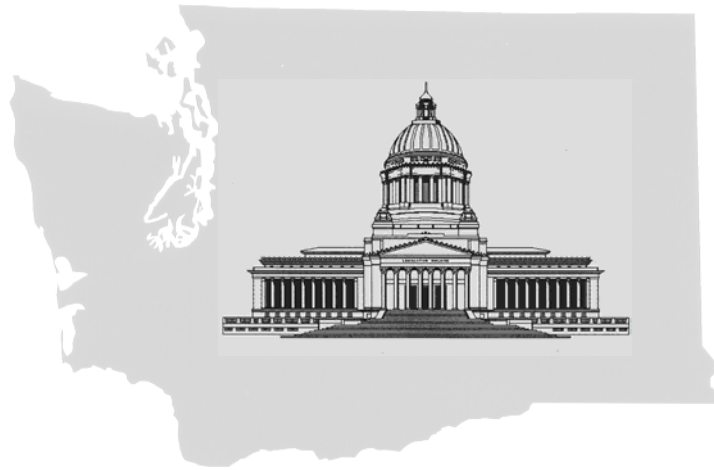


**State of Washington  
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC)**



**Follow-up: 1998-2001 WorkFirst  
Evaluations**

**Report 03-4**

**May 15, 2003**

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in alternative formats for persons with disabilities.*

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JLARC staff, under the direction of the Committee and the Legislative Auditor, conduct performance audits, program evaluations, sunset reviews, and other policy and fiscal studies. These studies assess the efficiency and effectiveness of agency operations, impacts and outcomes of state programs, and levels of compliance with legislative direction and intent. The Committee makes recommendations to improve state government performance and to correct problems it identifies. The Committee also follows up on these recommendations to determine how they have been implemented. JLARC has, in recent years, received national recognition for a number of its major studies.

**FOLLOW-UP: 1998-  
2001 WORKFIRST  
EVALUATIONS**

**REPORT DIGEST**

MAY 15, 2003



STATE OF WASHINGTON

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## INTRODUCTION

The Washington Legislature enacted major policy legislation in 1997 to change the direction of this state's public assistance program. That policy change articulated the goals to be achieved through a reformed welfare system, and also directed JLARC to evaluate how these policy goals were being accomplished. From 1998 through 2001, JLARC tracked, evaluated, and reported on the policy outcomes achieved through WorkFirst—Washington's welfare reform effort. As part of its 2003-05 Work Plan, JLARC members directed staff to follow up on the status and progress of WorkFirst in 2003.

This report responds to our Committee's request and builds upon past JLARC studies, which found the program to be effective in meeting legislative goals and objectives. Specifically, this follow-up study focuses on caseload patterns and trends, the effect of the 5-year limit on public assistance eligibility, and performance measures for WorkFirst. Our follow-up report finds:

- **Caseloads** decreased by 37 percent during the program's first six years (1997-2003), and have **not** risen in a time of increased unemployment and a recession regionally and nationally. Despite the overall decline in cases, the **child-only caseload** has risen both in numbers and as a percentage of the caseload.
- The Legislature placed a **5-year, lifetime limit** on eligibility for public assistance under WorkFirst. In August 2002, the first group of clients exceeded that time limit. As a result, some clients who refused to participate in work activities no longer receive cash assistance grants, while those who continue to actively participate in WorkFirst received extensions beyond 60 months. Federal and state laws allow Washington to extend these time limits to as much as 20 percent of the caseload. Currently, Washington has provided **time-limit extensions to 4 percent** of the caseload.
- WorkFirst's **performance measures** appear to be fully integrated into the entire system, both centrally and in the field. Coordination of accountability efforts in the Office of Financial Management continues to ensure that these performance measures are recognized and used at all levels of WorkFirst's operations.



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# CHAPTER ONE – WORKFIRST FOLLOW-UP: Background

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In 1997, the Washington Legislature passed EHB 3901, known as the Washington WorkFirst Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Act. This bill established the WorkFirst program, which emphasized the temporary nature of welfare by placing a 60-month lifetime limit on cash assistance for families. It required adults to participate in activities that would lead to a job, either through training, education, or subsidized community jobs. Four state agencies coordinate to provide WorkFirst services and implement mandated goals: the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the Employment Security Department (ESD), the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), and the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED). For a description of each agency's role, refer to Appendix 1.

## Washington's Legislative Goals

When the Legislature enacted EHB 3901, it established five objectives:

- WorkFirst will reduce the use of welfare.
- WorkFirst will help welfare recipients become employed and stay employed.
- WorkFirst will accomplish these objectives better than its predecessor, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program.
- WorkFirst will raise clients' earnings.
- WorkFirst will use performance-based contracting to provide services to clients.

Previous JLARC studies found that WorkFirst successfully accomplished these goals. Caseloads declined, employment levels were up, clients earned more, and job retention increased.

The Legislature also established specific requirements for the WorkFirst program to meet:

- The caseload will decrease 15 percent during the 1997–99 Biennium and 5 percent for the 1999-2001 Biennium. This has been achieved—since 1997, the number of families on welfare has dropped by approximately 37 percent.
- WorkFirst participants may receive benefits for a maximum of 60 months with provisions for extensions. Clients have received extensions for a variety of circumstances beyond 60 months. Extensions are discussed in greater detail on page 11.
- No more than 20 percent of the caseload can receive extensions beyond the 60-month time limits for hardship or family violence. To date, only 4 percent of the caseload has been extended.

The Washington Legislature directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to evaluate the program's implementation and mandates included in this legislation. Previously, JLARC conducted extensive evaluations with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP), which assessed pre- and post-employment services, and studied the possible effects of the 5-year time limit. This follow-up report builds upon previous JLARC studies, and focuses on three additional issues: caseload levels and composition, the effects of the 5-year lifetime limit, which clients first reached in August 2002, and the program's performance management system.



# CHAPTER TWO – CASELOAD PATTERNS

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## Caseload Remains Stable Despite Recession

The Legislature mandated specific caseload reduction targets for WorkFirst to achieve in its first six years: 15 percent during the 1997–99 Biennium and 5 percent for the 1999-2001 Biennium. The 37 percent decline that the program achieved exceeded the Legislature’s expectations, and has remained relatively stable at a total caseload of about 55,000.

While the overall caseload remains stable, the caseload composition has changed significantly. The proportion of public assistance grants to families headed by a single adult has declined, yet the proportion of child-only cases continues to increase. At the same time, more clients have entered long-term sanction status. In the following sections we discuss these three caseload trends, as well as highlight findings from a WorkFirst Study conducted by the Employment Security Department (ESD). The ESD study provides information previously not available on the characteristics of TANF recipients.

Since its 1997 inception, WorkFirst, or TANF, caseloads have declined by over one-third, as shown in Exhibit 1 on the following page. The dramatic decline in caseloads initially occurred in a strong economy, but there was concern that they would increase during a recession. Despite the economic downturn, however, Washington continues to report lower numbers than a year ago.<sup>1</sup> In January 2003, 55,777 families received TANF—down from 57,015 in January 2002. The caseload decline has occurred across the state, in both rural and urban areas. Washington’s caseload experience is similar to the national trend. After seven years of declining caseloads, most states saw TANF use increase in the last six months of 2001, followed by a leveling off throughout 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Although concern continues to exist that higher unemployment levels will result in increased TANF use, there is little consensus among national studies on the connection between higher joblessness rates and the growth in welfare caseloads.<sup>3</sup> While it is unclear how future changes in Washington’s economy will affect caseloads, WorkFirst continues to find jobs for public assistance recipients during the current recession. An economist with the Labor Market and Economic Analysis division of ESD suggests that the current recession has had the most significant impact on the middle class in Washington, and may not affect the availability of entry-level jobs that most WorkFirst clients obtain.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to ESD’s Labor Market and Economic Analysis, the recession began in the first quarter of 2001 (Washington’s Current Recession in a Historical Context—1980 – 2002).

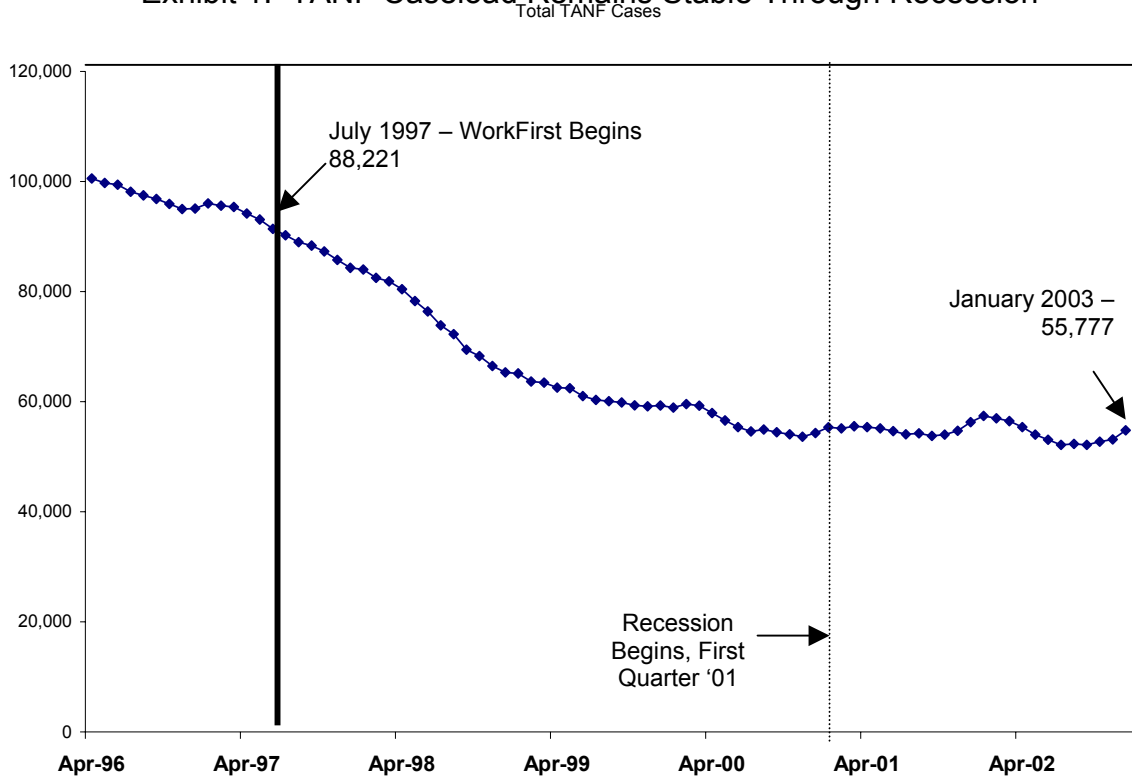
<sup>2</sup> Only five states have experienced significant caseload growth, with Nevada’s growth totaling more than 100 percent of its March 2000 low.

<sup>3</sup> Jack Tweedie, “Welfare Reform: Doing Well, Trying to Do Better,” *NCSL State Legislatures*, January 2003, p. 30. For arguments discussing the connection between increased caseload numbers and economic recessions, see Douglas Besharov “The Past and Future of Welfare Reform,” (*Public Interest*, Winter 2003) and Rebecca Blank “Welfare and the Economy” (*Urban Institute*, Policy Brief No. 7, September 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Meeting with Dr. Greg Weeks, Director, Labor Market and Economic Analysis, March 11, 2003.

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Exhibit 1: TANF Caseload Remains Stable Through Recession



Source: OFM.

## CASELOAD COMPOSITION

While overall caseload numbers continue to decline, the composition of the caseload has changed in two areas: grants to one-parent families have **decreased**, and child-only grants have **increased**. Child-only grants provide assistance to a child if an adult caretaker is ineligible for TANF (includes undocumented immigrants and adults with felony drug convictions), or not legally obligated to care for the child.

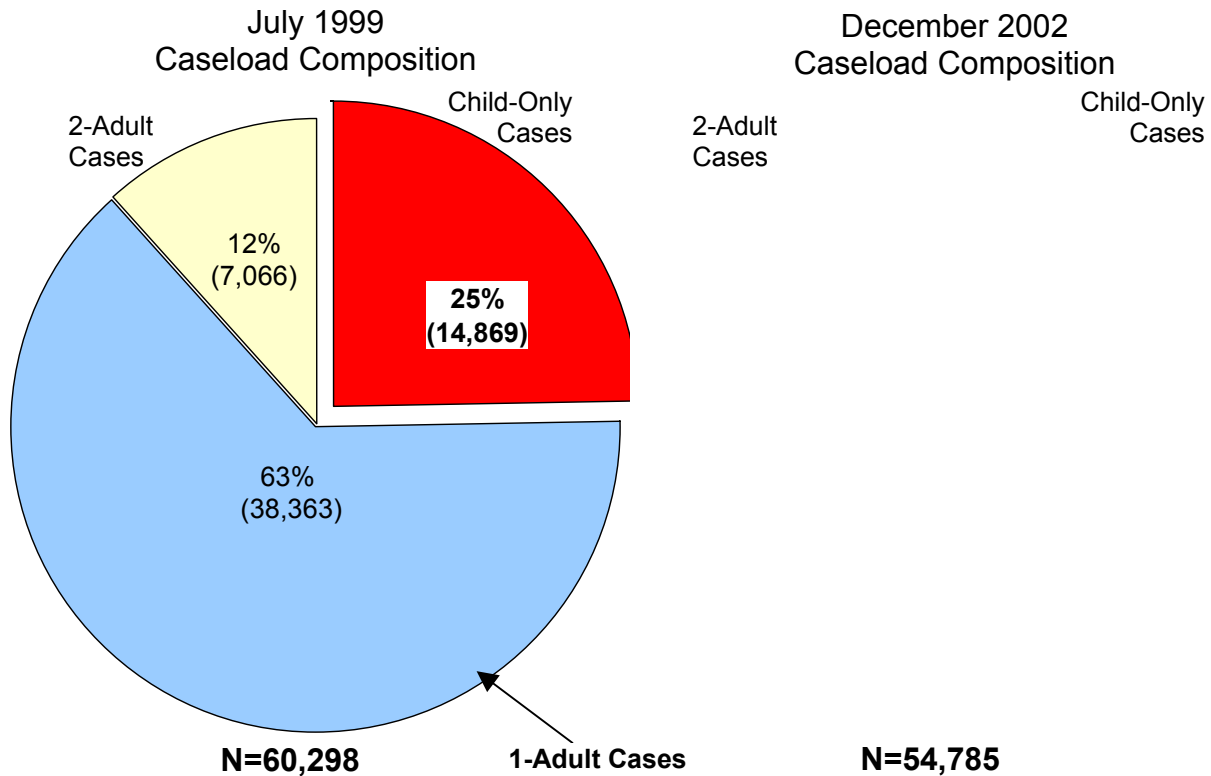
### One-Parent Grants Decline

The first change in the overall WorkFirst caseload is the decline of one-parent grants. The number of one-parent grants has steadily decreased, both as a number and percentage of the caseload. Exhibit 2 on the following page demonstrates the change in the caseload composition. We found little evidence that suggests that one-parent families have converted to child-only grants—this would not occur programmatically. Instead, one-parent cases have likely left the caseload for a number of reasons. The *3,000 Washington Families* study (discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter) suggests the following are some of the reasons for the decline in this group: marriage, moving to another state, and the greatest factor—work.

### Child-Only Cases Increase

In accordance with the goals of federal welfare reform, most states have succeeded in reducing caseload levels. Nationally, however, child-only cases have not declined. Child-only cases are grants that support the children and not the adults in the household. These grants, not subject to the 60-month

Exhibit 2 – Child-Only Grants Increasing as a Portion of Caseload



Source: <http://iesa.dshs.wa.gov/imrda/>.

time limit, cover the children until they are 18 or 19, if they are participating full time in secondary education or training. Currently, child-only grants account for about 30 percent of all cases nationally, and in some states, represent half of all TANF caseloads.<sup>5</sup> Washington’s child-only caseload reflects the national trend—the child-only caseload currently represents over one-third of the total caseload (19,485 in December 2002), a substantial increase from less than one-quarter of the caseload in July 1999 (14,869).<sup>6</sup>

Currently, little is known about why the child-only caseload is increasing. It is not clear whether the caseload in Washington is static—if the children currently receiving grants are the same children who have received grants since the reform was introduced in 1997—or dynamic, similar to the adult population. However, child-only cases are an increasing portion of the total TANF caseload, and for this reason will require attention in coming biennia if the primary objective remains lowering overall caseloads.

As the child-only caseload increases, it is necessary to identify any special needs and/or issues particular to this group. Children in these cases are cared for by a diverse array of caregivers. Exhibit 3 on the following page provides a brief description of each group of caregivers, followed by their total number in both July 1999 and December 2002, and the percentage of the entire TANF population that each group represented.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/only>.

<sup>6</sup> Due to a change in the counting methodology, an accurate count of child-only grants is only available from July 1999. Nonetheless, this data demonstrates the magnitude of growth that is occurring within this section of the TANF population.

Exhibit 3 – Child-Only Caregivers

Group	July 1999: 25% of Total Caseload		December 2002: 36% of Total Caseload	
	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Non-Parent Caretakers:</b>				
<b>Relative caretakers:</b> Typically, grandparents or others who care for their grandchildren, nieces or nephews, and receive benefits on the child’s behalf. Often, parents are unable to care for their children as a result of substance abuse or incarceration. Since relative caregivers do not have a legal obligation to the children, the children are eligible to receive a grant regardless of the caregiver’s income.	7,153	12%	8,171	15%
<b>Legal guardians:</b> As the result of a March 2001 lawsuit, children living with adults in place of their parents (not relatives of any degree) are eligible to receive a child-only grant.	1	0%	611	1%
<b>Parent Caretakers:</b>				
<b>Supplemental Security Income Recipients (SSI):</b> These parents are ineligible to receive both TANF and SSI, although they are able to receive TANF on their child’s behalf.	4,426	7%	5,075	9%
<b>Illegal or undocumented immigrants parents:</b> Illegal Immigrants are ineligible to receive TANF. If their children were born in the U.S., the child is eligible for a child-only grant.	2,933	5%	4,703	9%
<b>Disqualified:</b> Parents who are disqualified from receiving a TANF grant as a result of a felony drug conviction or fraud.	363	1%	767	1%

Note: Numbers do not sum to totals due to a change in DSHS’ counting methodology, as well as various categories with minimal numbers of cases.

Source: DSHS.

Nearly half of these cases (the relative caretakers and legal guardian cases) involve children that are cared for by individuals other than their biological parents. At least one other state, New Jersey, studied this group and determined that these caregivers are in poorer health than caregivers of regular TANF cases, and that the children have more behavioral and academic problems than children in regular TANF families.<sup>7</sup> Currently, a DSHS program specialist does not interact with these children until they are 16 years of age. The lack of formal contact with the child makes it difficult to assess what additional services can be targeted to child-only cases. Currently, it is not known how many of

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Wood and Debra Strong, “The Status of Child-Only TANF Cases” Mathematica Policy Research, May 2002.

the child-only cases convert to regular TANF cases. In the summer of 2003, OFM and DSHS plan to study the services that these children use to learn more about child-only cases.

In addition to studying the nature of the child-only cases, there are also a couple of possible approaches to begin addressing this caseload. The state could either assist the relative caregiver, or provide case support to the biological parent to resolve the situation that led to the child being placed in a situation necessitating a TANF grant. While the Legislature has considered relative caregiver cases in recent biennia, ongoing attention to all child-only cases is required.<sup>8</sup>

## CHANGES IN SANCTIONING

All clients that do not comply with WorkFirst requirements to look for employment, participate in approved training, or engage in work, are sanctioned for nonparticipation. Sanctioning penalties are progressive, and range from losing a portion of the TANF grant, to having a reduced grant sent to a third-party contractor that pays for essential services for dependent children. When a client is in sanction status, her/his TANF months continue to accrue toward the 60-month lifetime limit. In August 2002, WorkFirst implemented two changes in client sanctioning: the adoption of tougher sanction policies and the Customer Automated Tracking System (CATS).<sup>9</sup>

### What Changed in August 2002?

Before August 2002, a client could go into sanction and “cure” the sanction by participating as required for two weeks. Policy requires the department to give clients the opportunity to provide a good reason for nonparticipation and then provide clients with sufficient notice of any adverse action; as a result, it could take up to 45 days to impose a sanction. Clients frequently “cured” the sanction before a financial penalty was imposed. If a client went into sanction again, the process started over. As a result, clients often cycled in and out of sanction, and participated to the minimal extent needed to avoid financial penalties. The sanction process got tougher in August 2002 in the following ways:

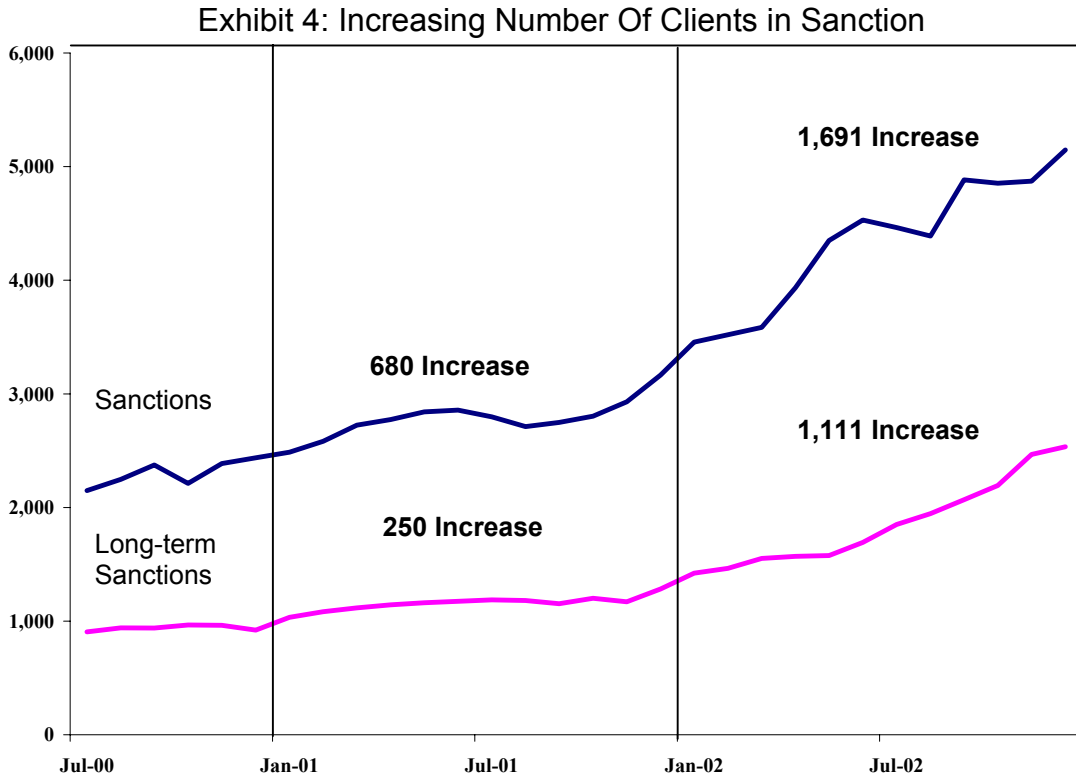
- Once a client is sanctioned, it becomes part of her/his permanent record. If a client goes into sanction a second time, the TANF grant is sent to a protective payee. If the client goes into sanction a third time, they begin their sanction with a protective payee and a higher financial penalty, losing either their share of the grant, or 40 percent of the grant—whichever is higher.
- After three months, when a client is considered to be in long-term sanction, or for a second or third sanction, it takes two weeks longer for a client to cure their sanction by participating as required. DSHS reports that most clients do not cure their sanction before the related financial and protective payee penalties are imposed at this stage.
- DSHS established stronger rules that designate two unexcused absences in a month as a failure to participate. CATS computerized attendance tracking for ESD job search clients, who must sign in with a unique client identifier each day at Job Search, or call in to receive an excused absence.

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<sup>8</sup> SHB 1397 of the 2002 session directed DSHS to produce a report on Kinship Care on policy issues required to make kinship care a robust component of the out-of-home child placement. See DSHS *Kinship Care Report to the Legislature*, November 1, 2002. Also see Appendix 2 for a description of other states’ approaches to child-only case assistance.

<sup>9</sup> CATS is currently used at ESD’s Job Search, which is the primary means of assisting WorkFirst participants in finding work. At Job Search, Clients have access to computers, organized hiring events, and assistance from ESD Job Search Specialists with applications, letters, and resume. For a description of Job Search and other major WorkFirst programs, refer to Appendix 3.

Prior to the programmatic changes of August 2002, there had been an increase in the number of clients receiving sanctions and those remaining in long-term sanction. This trend has continued, as displayed in Exhibit 4 below shows the increase in each of these categories, and their increase relative to the prior calendar year. While the program has been successful in penalizing non-participating clients, it is still important to reengage these clients in WorkFirst activities that could lead to unsubsidized employment.



Source: DSHS data compiled by JLARC staff.

### Why Are Clients Placed In Long-Term Sanction?

In September 2001, DSHS studied WorkFirst clients in long-term sanction to understand why they were not participating. DSHS staff examined 148 one- and two-parent sanctioned cases to better understand this group.

The reasons for long-term sanction varied; however, the most common reason was refusal to participate. Specifically, case record reviews found:

- 81 percent stated they did not want to participate
- 4 percent claimed they were unable to participate due to medical reasons, but failed to provide supporting evidence
- 3 percent were part-time students who did not want to look for work
- 2 percent did not follow through with substance abuse assessment or treatment

## 3,000 WASHINGTON FAMILIES: CLIENT CONDITIONS

The Employment Security Department began a longitudinal study of WorkFirst clients in December 1999 to understand how to best help move families from WorkFirst to self-sufficiency. The study, *3,000 Washington Families*, is collecting information on a sample of 3,000 current and former WorkFirst clients, and tracking their experiences over time. ESD's report provides insight on a broad range of activities and characteristics of these clients.

### Employment and Earnings

For the time period of March 1999 to March 2000:

- 52 percent of clients left WorkFirst cash assistance for work reasons, such as a new job, or higher pay.
- The average earnings of all WorkFirst participants was \$2,200/quarter.
- After participating in WorkFirst for one year, clients worked an average of 38 hours/week. Another group of new WorkFirst clients who just entered the program worked an average of 30 hours/week. This reinforces the theme that increased work experience leads to increased hours of work, and thus increased labor market attachment.<sup>10</sup>

### Challenges

The study highlights the challenges clients face with irregular schedules, benefits, and health.

- 50 percent of all clients reported working evening or weekend hours in their recent job.<sup>11</sup>
- Less than half of the clients reported receiving benefits such as paid leave or health insurance in their most recent job. However, most clients and their children were either covered by Medicaid or another health plan.<sup>12</sup>
- About two-thirds of clients described their health as good or excellent, but the other third reported poor or fair health. One-quarter of all clients reported receiving some kind of mental health care during the previous year.<sup>13</sup>

This data indicates that helping clients achieve self-sufficiency means DSHS must not only assist these clients in finding employment, but also must help clients address ways to deal with childcare issues and/or other needs.

### WorkFirst Effectiveness

Data from the *3,000 Washington Families* report provides insight into the effectiveness of several WorkFirst programs. A description of these programs is provided in Appendix 3.

- Clients that attended the Job Search Workshop were more likely to be employed and earn more money than clients who did not attend.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Employment for 1999 and 2000 TANF Clients*, p. 5, available: [http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/EmploymentReport4\\_02.pdf](http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/EmploymentReport4_02.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> *Employment for 1999 and 2000 TANF Clients*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Employment*, p. 4, available: <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/STudyEmployment.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> *Employment*, p.1.

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- Pre-Employment Training is estimated to increase earnings and employment.<sup>15</sup>
- Both programs are likely to increase employment.<sup>16</sup>

A final trend that remains consistent among WorkFirst clients is the challenge of finding long-term, continued employment. Most participants are finding employment for at least some period of time. However, many WorkFirst clients leave and re-enter the rolls for short periods of time. This suggests that these clients—even those traditionally considered “harder to serve”—are finding employment for at least some length of time, but face difficulties in sustaining their employment.<sup>17</sup>

WorkFirst’s success in helping clients find unsubsidized employment has contributed to its ability to maintain a stable caseload during a difficult economy. Although the program has been successful in meeting the Legislature’s caseload goals, it is necessary to monitor the child-only caseload and clients in long-term sanction in order to ensure that caseload patterns are sustained.

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<sup>14</sup> *WorkFirst Activities for October 2000 Recipients*, p. 6, available: <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/stdyimpacts02.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> *WorkFirst Activities for October 2000 Recipients*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> *TANF Experiences, Exits, and Returns*, p.4, available: <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/about/StudyTANF.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> The report provides insight into the “cycler” population: 57 percent of a group of WorkFirst respondents left TANF for at least two consecutive months (the remaining 43 percent continued to receive assistance). Of the group that left, 8 percent returned within three months, 16 percent returned within six months, and 33 percent returned within 12 months.<sup>17</sup>

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# CHAPTER THREE – 5-YEAR TIME LIMITS

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## Extensions Continue Assistance

A key provision of WorkFirst is the 60-month lifetime limit on adults in families receiving welfare. In August 2002, the first WorkFirst clients exceeded the 60-month limit. State and federal laws allow Washington to exempt up to 20 percent of its total caseload from the 60-month lifetime limit. If more than 20 percent of the caseload exceeds 60 months of TANF use, Washington will have to provide for those clients solely with state dollars.<sup>18</sup>

The Legislature provided DSHS with broad authority in determining who would be eligible for extension, only stipulating that extensions be granted for hardship or family violence, as defined by federal law. Based on the previous fiscal year caseload, Washington could exempt as many as 10,922 cases.<sup>19</sup>

In August 2002, Washington provided the first extensions to clients beyond 60 months, and was well below its 20 percent limit. For an overview of other states' approaches to the 5-year limit, see Appendix 4. Extensions in Washington were provided in the following categories:

- *Exemption*: A severe, long-term condition that prevents a client from finding or keeping a job. The client is not required to participate in WorkFirst because services often cannot address the barrier. A DSHS program specialist can determine that an exemption is appropriate at any time for clients who are unable to work, or for whom Job Search is not appropriate. This group includes individuals who have long-term physical or mental disabilities, older (age 55+) caregivers of children, and primary caregivers of disabled children or relatives.
- *Child Safety Net Payment (CSNP)*: These are assistance extensions to the children of adults who were not participating in WorkFirst activities, and who lost their share of the TANF grant.<sup>20</sup>
- *Clients following WorkFirst Rules*: The following groups received extensions: individuals participating in WorkFirst activities, Family Violence Option (FVO) clients participating in FVO activities, individuals resolving barriers to employment, or individuals caring for a child less than four months old. These clients are actively participating in required WorkFirst activities, but required assistance beyond 60 months. Extensions may be renewed, and continued as long as the client meets all other eligibility criteria and continues participating in appropriate activities.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Washington can use federal dollars to continue coverage for as much as 20 percent if it chooses to do so.

<sup>19</sup> This is calculated by multiplying the average of the total caseload of the previous fiscal year, 54,609 for 2002, by 20 percent. [http://iesa.dshs.wa.gov/iesa/docs/esa\\_administration\\_program\\_review/esa\\_pr200302.pdf](http://iesa.dshs.wa.gov/iesa/docs/esa_administration_program_review/esa_pr200302.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> The CSNP only provides assistance for the children of a non-participating adult by removing the non-compliant parent's share, or 40 percent of the grant, whichever is greater. This category allows all of the children on the caseload to continue receiving assistance, and removes adults who are not participating in required WorkFirst activities.

<sup>21</sup> *Source: DSHS Eligibility A-Z Manual* <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/esa/eazmanual/Sections/TANFtime-B-ext.htm>.

As of December 2002, a total of 2,127 cases had exceeded the 60-month lifetime limit. Adults not participating in WorkFirst activities lost TANF assistance; however, their children continued to receive assistance through the CSNP. Washington currently provides additional coverage in the following manner:

Exhibit 5 – Assistance Continues for Most 60-Month Clients

Category	Number in December 2002	Post-60 month result
Exemptions	454	These clients are not required to participate in WorkFirst activities.
CSNP	495	This ensures that no child lost assistance following the 60-month time limit, but does not continue assistance to the caregiver.
Clients Following Rules	1,178	The parent(s) must continue participating in WorkFirst activities or lose TANF benefits.

Source: DSHS.

Previously, JLARC and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) completed a detailed analysis that projected the number of WorkFirst participants who would reach the 5-year time limit, and produced an estimate that was much higher than the actual number granted extensions.<sup>22</sup> This study was done prior to any clients reaching the 5-year lifetime limit, and before the program had any experience with the actual numbers who required additional assistance. The estimate proved inaccurate, as Washington is well below its allowed 20 percent limit. Now that the state has experience granting extensions, it may be necessary to recalculate future numbers of how many clients are likely to require extensions beyond 60 months.

### Who Received WorkFirst Extensions Beyond 60 Months?

According to data provided by DSHS, the average extension recipient is 37 years old, with 2.5 children.

- Of the 2,127 who had exceeded 60 months on WorkFirst by December 2002, 94% had received AFDC benefits between 1990-1997, before WorkFirst began
- 59% have 12 or more years education
- 65% have worked in the past two years
- 16% were 22 or younger when they entered WorkFirst
- 19% are currently married

<sup>22</sup> See JLARC *Welfare Caseload Trends in Washington State, 1997-2000*, p. 15. Previous research by JLARC and WSIPP estimated that 2,364 adults would reach the 5-year lifetime TANF limit by August 2002, and that 7,600 adults were at risk of reaching the 5-year lifetime TANF limit between August 2002 and July 2003.

# CHAPTER FOUR – PERFORMANCE MEASURES

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## MEASURES ARE TRACKED AT ALL LEVELS

Federal welfare reform of 1996 established specific measures which states needed to meet in order to receive federal funding. As part of these requirements, states must assist a defined number of adults in finding employment.<sup>23</sup> Beyond the mandates necessary to receive federal funds, the Legislature required WorkFirst to develop measures to track the program's success.

WorkFirst developed a three-tiered performance measurement system that connects the state administration, local management, and field operations. The three tiers are significant because the system allows for an assessment of the program as a whole, assigns responsibility to specific WorkFirst partners, and allows local Community Service Offices (CSO) to evaluate their performance against other offices in their region and the state.

### TIER 1

Tier 1 measures consist of seven objectives that track long-term program goals, and also comprise the Governor's WorkFirst Performance Report. Local field offices' ability to meet the performance measures in the second and third tier affects whether these goals are met. We provide an example of a target measure and program experience in Tier 1:

- *Jobs leading to exit from TANF*

*Goal:* Increase the number of clients moving from WorkFirst to employment to self-sufficiency.

*Target:* Return to the maximum employment-to-exit rates in program's history, with adjustments for seasonality. Improve on these rates by 3 percentage points per year.

*Experience to date:* Among clients who entered TANF in June 2002, 29.8 percent became employed and left TANF within six months. This is three percentage points below the target of 32.8 percent for this month.<sup>24</sup>

Other measures tracked are:

- *Percent remaining employed:* Percent of TANF adults with an employment exit who remain employed for the year following exit.
- *Percent with increased earnings:* Percent of adults exiting TANF whose earnings increase by 10 percent after one year.
- *Child support paid:* Percent of current and recent TANF child support cases with paid child support.
- *Long-term exits from TANF:* Percent of clients leaving TANF who remain off assistance for at least one year.

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<sup>23</sup> For one-parent families, states were required to have 25 percent working in FY97, 40 percent in FY00, 50 percent in FY02 and following years; if there were two parents, 75 percent of adult recipients were required to work in FY97 and 98, and 90 percent in FY99 and following years.

<sup>24</sup> This comprises the Governor's Report for the Jobs Leading to Exit from TANF (Measure 1). The complete report is available on-line at: <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/statestaff/PerfReport1.pdf>.

- *Alternative assistance for applicants*: Percent of withdrawn or denied TANF applicants who receive alternative sources of aid.
- *Caseload (adults and child-only)*: Total number of cases receiving TANF each month.

## **TIER 2**

Tier 2 measures take the Tier 1 measures and apply them to specific activities in CSOs. These are referred to as “feeder measures.” If CSOs meet their Tier 2 measures, the state will succeed in meeting the long-term goals in Tier 1.

CSO targets are established in relation to their performance during the same month the previous year, plus the addition of a 5 percent improvement. These targets encompass the WorkFirst partnership, and also include a measure for the Division of Child Support (DCS), which is held accountable for increasing support collections of current and former TANF recipients. They are:

- *Customer accountability*: Percent of clients in full-time participation (DSHS-Community Services Division (CSD))
- *Movement from Job Search to work*: Percent of clients who get a full- or part-time job within 90 days of starting Job Search (ESD/DSHS)
- *High-wage placements*: Median placement wage for clients (ESD)
- *Customized Job Skills Training*: Placement rates for CJST clients (Colleges)
- *Community Jobs*: Placement rate for CJ clients (Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED))
- *Child Support*: Rate of collection of child support for current and recent TANF recipients (DSHS-Division of Child Support (DCS))
- *WPLEX contacts*: Percent of new clients in the WPLEX queue who receive services within a short time frame (ESD)
- *Alternative assistance*: Percent denied TANF applicants who receive alternative forms of aid (DSHS-CSD)
- *Adult caseload*

The practices of CSOs that succeeded in meeting or exceeding their Tier 2 performance measures need to be widely shared. These best practices could improve the performance of CSOs across the state. Cost-effective means of sharing best practices should be explored in order to make best practices widely available to other CSOs. Throughout our interviews, CSO managers relied upon others in their region for insight on effective practices, and could likely benefit from the work and innovation of other CSOs in the state.

## **TIER 3**

Tier 3 measures are designed to help local managers monitor the daily performance of their offices, and put the long-term goals of the Tier 1 measures in place at an operational level. The CSO managers we interviewed cited these measures as a useful tool. Tier 3 measures feed directly into the Tier 2 measures, and allow CSO managers to assess their office’s contribution to meeting statewide WorkFirst program goals. They are:

- *TANF entries and exits*: Total adult entrants minus the cumulative exits from WorkFirst
- *Attendance at Job Search*: Total number of clients signing into Job Search divided by the total number of clients expected to sign into Job Search
- *Referred back from Job Search*: Total percentage of clients referred back to the program specialist from Job Search
- *Client status after being referred back*: Tracks the activities of clients two weeks after s/he is referred back to a program specialist because of not meeting program requirements or failure to report
- *Entry to Job Search and time spent resolving issues*: Tracks the time the CSO is able to place clients in Job Search
- *Referral from Job Search to education*: Rate at which the CSO referred clients to SBCTC-administered education or training activities
- *Job Search to other components*: Tracks activities of Job Search participants—how many find employment, how many participate, and how many drop out
- *Flow from Job Search to employment and exit*: Total count of full-time and part-time work placements made from Job Search
- *Adult caseload*

The caseload reduction measure in Tier 1 is significant in that both adults and child-only cases are included in the target objective. Tier 2 and 3 measures both contain targets for the adult-only caseload, and exclude the child-only figures. If the state hopes to reduce the child-only caseload, measures need to be established at an operational level to provide CSOs with the incentives and information necessary to reduce the caseload. At the CSOs we visited, employees and managers alike were unaware of the size of the child-only caseload.

The plateauing of caseloads in the state as a whole may signal the need to reevaluate the CSO performance targets and/or focus more closely at the other case related performance measures. Though there should always be an overall focus on lowering the caseload, there may come a point when the rate at which clients are leaving TANF is close to that of those entering, thus making it difficult for CSOs to maintain the same level of caseload reduction. Currently CSOs must show a 5 percent decrease in caseloads over the same month in the previous year. From July 2002 to December 2002, 20 out of the 52 CSOs in the state did **not** meet their caseload performance target for three out of the last six months. If this trend continues, it will be necessary to look closer at the dynamics of the caseload. Focusing on the other performance measures under the new three-tier approach could provide a more in-depth understanding of what is happening with the caseload as a whole.

## Child Support

A major component of the Washington WorkFirst Act was increasing child support collection to TANF and former-TANF recipients. The intent was to increase collections, and provide another source of income to clients to divert them from WorkFirst, or help them leave the caseload. Child support collections are often a significant factor in a family's ability to leave welfare:

nationally, 42 percent of families that leave welfare derive 30 percent of their income from child support.<sup>25</sup>

Two divisions within the Economic Services Administration (ESA) of DSHS work these cases. The Division of Child Support (DCS) is identified as responsible for increasing child support collections, and works with non-custodial parents. The Community Services Division (CSD) works with the custodial parents who apply for or receive public assistance.

As previous JLARC reports have noted, effectively engaging four agencies in WorkFirst operations poses a challenge in managing the program. Coordination between DCS and some CSOs has proven difficult as well. In our discussions with case managers at two of the CSOs we visited, we were told that there was little coordination between the two divisions of ESA.

At the Yakima CSO, however, we learned of a new approach, “Child Support Counts,” that tries to more effectively partner CSOs with DCS. This new initiative between DCS and CSD began in January 2003, and works to increase child support collections among TANF cases by improving the communication with the custodial parent in order to obtain more information about the non-custodial parent. Currently, the ten offices piloting the project have taken a range of approaches to collect this information, from referring all new TANF cases to a single DCS point of contact, to having a dedicated phone line for TANF clients to call for assistance.

Results of the initiative will be evaluated in July 2003 on the primary measure of whether collections increased for current and former TANF recipients. While it is unclear whether or how much this initiative will increase collections, the collaboration between the two divisions is a positive move towards increasing the financial resources of WorkFirst clients.

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<sup>25</sup> Elaine Sorensen and Chava Zibman, “To What Extent do Children Benefit from Child Support,” Urban Institute, January 15, 2000, p. 13.

# CHAPTER FIVE – FUTURE ACTIVITIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

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## FEDERAL LEGISLATION

The reauthorization of federal welfare funding could significantly affect WorkFirst in the future. In FY 2002, federal funding accounted for 51 percent of total Washington TANF revenue. WorkFirst successfully met federally established targets, and receives \$398 million annually from the federal government.<sup>26</sup> Federal welfare reform law expired in October 2002, and federal assistance has operated through a series of continuing resolutions, which will continue funding to the states until a final reauthorization bill is passed.

Although Congress has yet to reauthorize federal assistance, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 4, its proposal to reauthorize welfare for the next five years. Significant changes would increase the number of clients required to be employed, and increase the number of hours they are required to work. However, the Senate has yet to pass a welfare reform bill; thus, it is not possible to project how welfare reauthorization will affect WorkFirst. A summary of H.R. 4 is provided in Appendix 5.

## NEW WORKFIRST INITIATIVES AND TECHNOLOGIES

WorkFirst is a constantly evolving program that has adopted new services and technologies to meet both client and employee needs. Three examples of this evolution include the Coordinated Services Initiative (CSI), the Targeted Wage Initiative (TWI), and new technologies available across the state.

### Coordinated Services Initiative

The Coordinated Services Initiative (CSI) was piloted in January of 2002. The program's purpose is to coordinate efforts among DSHS agencies and community partners in order to prevent the duplication of services to clients. Beginning in November of 2003, CSI will be adopted statewide.

Among the new initiatives that have resulted from CSI are case staffings that target clients with at least 36 months of TANF use who are also clients of multiple DSHS divisions. In a typical case staffing, the DSHS program specialist brings together staff from various service agencies and community partners to use their collective knowledge to work on a difficult TANF case. For example, a staffing could consist of a child support enforcement officer, a mental health evaluator, an ESD staff person, and the client's program specialist and social worker. This team of service providers works with the client to develop a plan of action to move past barriers and towards self-sufficiency.

CSI case staffings target interventions earlier than the program policy currently requires. Current WorkFirst policy **recommends** that program specialists or social workers conduct case staffings at 48 months. The policy only **requires** a case staffing at 58 months to determine what extension

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<sup>26</sup> The remaining 49 percent of WorkFirst's revenue consisted of State Maintenance of Effort funds, required by federal legislation.

or exemption category is appropriate for a client, and to ensure that the program has pursued all appropriate options for him or her.

In contrast, CSI case staffings focus in on a particular subsection of TANF clients and require an intervention at 36 months, to help families with multiple barriers reach financial independence faster and more efficiently by intervening at an earlier time. Case managers we interviewed all described the value of case staffings, and positive outcomes that resulted from collaborating with other professionals who worked with WorkFirst clients. In our research, we learned of the Clarkston and Colfax CSOs that target interventions at 6 months. For a description of their intervention process, see Appendix 6.

While there are many benefits to collaboration, case staffings can be costly, time consuming, and difficult to organize if a client's needs require several professionals to participate. As a result, we found little consistency in when case staffings occurred in our site visits. Case managers we interviewed stated that the collaboration between the different departments allowed them to better serve the needs of their clients. They also commented that case staffings could be more valuable if they were held earlier in a client's spell on TANF, as CSI requires. However, no measurable outcomes from this approach exist.

### Targeted Wage Initiative

At the end of February 2003, WorkFirst implemented the Targeted Wage Initiative (TWI) in four selected "Learning Labs" around the state: Aberdeen, Spokane, Walla Walla, and Federal Way. TWI focuses on providing greater customer engagement, intensity, and structure into job search. The initiative's objectives are to more effectively connect clients with employers and ultimately, move them toward higher paying jobs. Each of the four locations has been given the latitude to design its own version of TWI. After the three-month test and evaluation period, the strategies that show the greatest positive impact on improving client's employment income will be considered for adoption across the state.

### New Technology

Finally, within the last year, WorkFirst has integrated new technologies in order to help program specialists manage their caseloads more efficiently and provide clients with better service. The following are a list of new innovations used by CSOs:

- *Document Management System (DMS)* – transfers paper into electronic case records. Program specialists and social workers can quickly and easily access this information at their desk.
- *Client Registry* – provides limited information on other services and benefits a client receives, as well as those given to others in that same household family unit.
- *Answer Phone* – allows clients to call and access current information on their case, apply for medical assistance, and report changes in their circumstances.

These new innovations could free up valuable time for project specialists and social workers that they in turn can spend assisting WorkFirst clients find and keep employment.



## CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSIONS

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WorkFirst has evolved since its 1997 inception in order to better meet the needs of its clients and more effectively move them towards self-sufficiency. Our follow-up found:

- WorkFirst has managed to maintain **stable caseloads** during difficult economic times. The caseload decreased 37 percent during the first six years, and continues to remain stable in a time of increased unemployment. However, the program should give attention to the **increase in child-only caseloads**.
- In August 2002, the first WorkFirst clients exceeded the **60-month lifetime limit** established by state and federal law. Clients that refused to participate in WorkFirst activities no longer receive grants, while those who qualified were given extensions. Currently, **less than 4 percent of the caseload receives time-limit extensions**—well below the 20 percent allowed by federal law.
- WorkFirst adopted a three-tiered **performance measurement system**, which allows for an assessment of the program’s effectiveness at each level of implementation. The new system also assigns responsibility to specific WorkFirst partners, and allows local Community Service Offices (CSO) to evaluate their performance against other offices in their region and the state. The program’s performance measures appear to be fully **integrated** at all program levels, from the field staff to the central office administrators.
- WorkFirst has developed several **new initiatives**, two of which work to improve coordination among DSHS agencies. Child Support Counts was established to improve communication with the custodial parent, and increase child support collections for TANF recipients. Additionally, the Coordinated Services Initiative was implemented to increase communication between DSHS divisions that serve common clients to prevent the duplication of assistance efforts and improve the service delivery. We have not found measurable outcomes from either effort, but both appear to be positive advances in coordination to help move clients toward self-sufficiency.



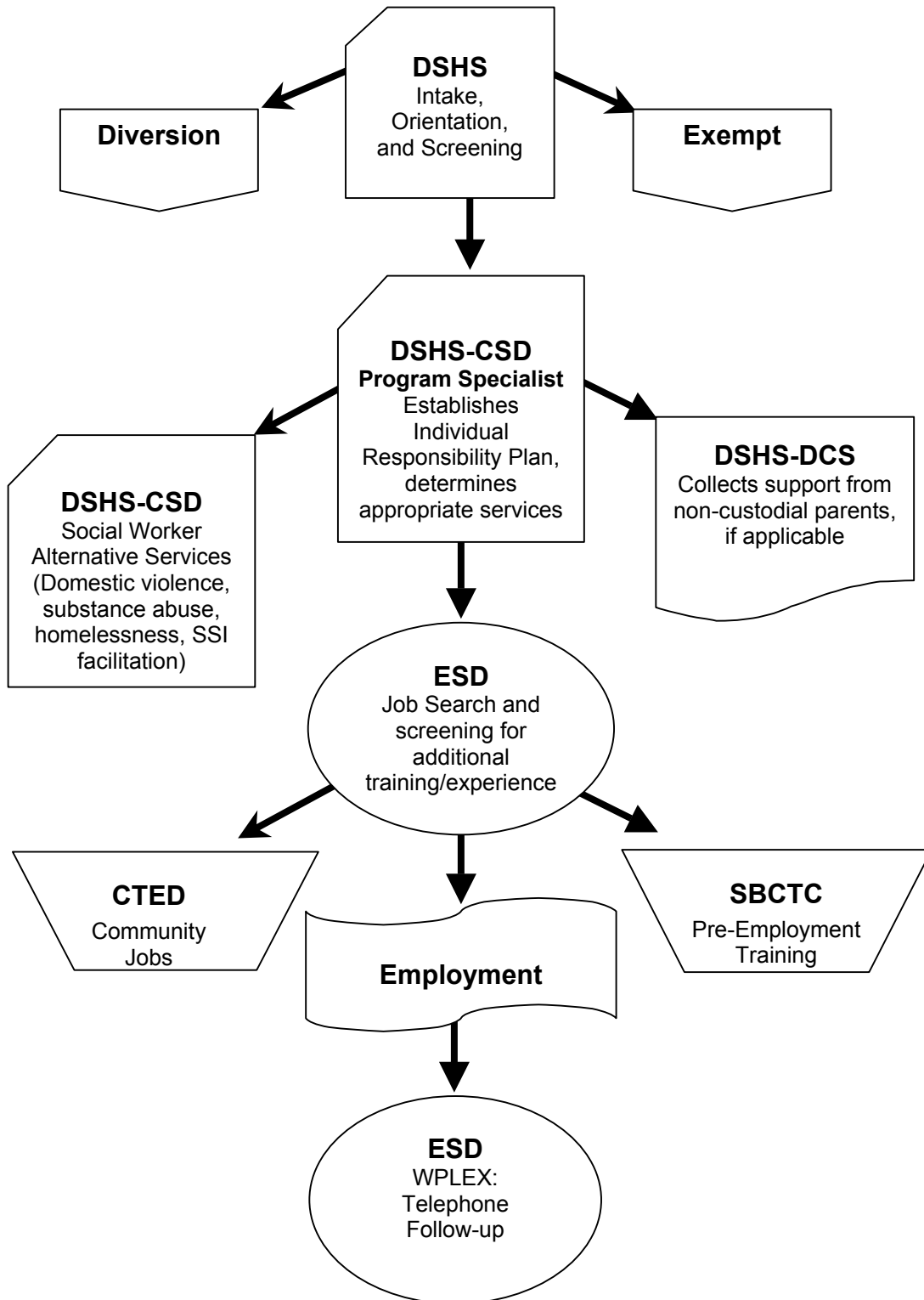
# APPENDIX 1 – THE AGENCIES’ ROLE IN WORKFIRST

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Four agencies work to provide WorkFirst services. Their roles are described below, and the chart on the following page shows each agency’s role in assisting clients.

- **Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)** is the point of entry, and ongoing point of contact for WorkFirst participants. A single program specialist works with participants throughout the process, assisting in the development of an employment plan, encouraging progress towards the goal of finding a job, and arranging for support services. Also involved from DSHS is the Division of Child Support. If child support is due to an applicant, a support enforcement officer will work to collect any money owed to the client.
- **Employment Security Department (ESD)** presents job search workshops and employment support. Staff work with participants and employers to place clients into appropriate jobs. Call center staff (WPLEX) contact new, low-wage workers to offer additional avenues for advancement and support.
- **State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)** provides training for basic skills and job advancement through the 34 community and technical colleges across the state. Training is offered during non-work hours and targeted towards fields with a high demand for workers. Staff also work with employers to design short-term training that leads directly to a job.
- **Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED)** administers the Community Jobs program (paid work and training for hard-to-serve clients), directs local area planning, and is a partner in business outreach.

# WORKFIRST CLIENT FLOW



Source: JLARC

## APPENDIX 2 – CHILD-ONLY SUPPORT IN OTHER STATES

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The Welfare Information Network and National Council of State Legislatures have each provided a description of innovative child-only programs in various states. Four states described by each have targeted services towards the guardians of children. Their practices are highlighted below.

- **New Jersey Kinship Navigator**—Referral service designed to help caregivers navigate government services, such as TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, health insurance, and childcare.
- **Alabama’s KinShare Pilot Program**—Services include childcare, respite care, special needs payments, emergency intervention services, and counseling.
- **Ohio Statewide Kinship Caregiver Services Program**—Program offers subsidized childcare, respite care for the caregiver, legal assistance, and training on how to deal with children with special needs. A toll-free number is available for caregivers to call for information and referrals to services.
- **California Kinship Support Services Program**—Provides grants to eligible counties to support relatives caring for children. Funds can be used for a wide array of services, including case management, housing, homemaker services, respite care, transportation, counseling, tutoring and day care.

For more information see: <http://www.welfareinfo.org/childonlycasesissuenote.htm> or <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/only>.



## APPENDIX 3 – MAJOR WASHINGTON WORKFIRST PROGRAMS

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<b>Program</b>	<b>Responsible Agency</b>	<b>Program Description</b>	<b>Length</b>
<b>Job Search Workshop</b>	Employment Security Department	Introductory workshop to prepare clients to search for a job.	1 week
<b>Job Search</b>	Employment Security Department	Supported job search which provides ongoing guidance and access to resource rooms. Program provides assistance with applications, resumes, and interviews and organizes hiring events.	Up to 12 weeks
<b>Pre-Employment Training</b>	State Board of Community and Technical Colleges	Intensive, short-term skills training customized to meet the needs of an identified employer with specified hiring requirements.	Up to 12 weeks
<b>Basic Job Skills Training</b>	State Board of Community and Technical Colleges	Provides basic skill instruction in reading, writing, ESL, and mathematics. Training meets an employer's needs, and provides the WorkFirst client with learning opportunities at work.	Up to 6 weeks
<b>Community Jobs</b>	Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development	Structured, subsidized work program with support services for difficult-to-employ clients.	9 months





## APPENDIX 4 – OTHER STATES AND THE 5-YEAR LIMIT

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The federal government established a 5-year maximum lifetime limit on the use of public assistance, and provided states with broad latitude in setting TANF-use limits. States have used the flexibility they received from the federal government to offer a range of time limit policies. The following is a summary of several states' policies on the 5-year limit, and the circumstances that permit extensions.

- Seven states have lifetime cutoff limits shorter than 60 months, while 22 have shorter periodic benefit cutoff limits (mandatory time without TANF that requires clients to test the labor market).<sup>27</sup>
- Families in Arizona, California, Indiana, and Rhode Island only lose the adult portion of benefits when adult clients reach the time limit.
- Texas cuts off benefits for adult clients between 12 to 36 months, but continues benefits for children until 60 months, when the entire family is cut off.
- Michigan and Vermont have no time limit on the receipt of cash assistance for either children or adults.
- Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, and Rhode Island do not count months in which a recipient is employed for at least a minimum number of hours towards the 60-month limit.<sup>28</sup>

Circumstances which permit extensions:

- *Unemployment despite good faith effort:* Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, Wisconsin
- *Client is participating in education or training:* Arizona, Illinois, South Carolina, Wyoming
- *Case worker discretion or individual circumstance:* Alaska, Massachusetts, Nebraska<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Vee Burke, "Welfare Reform: TANF Trends and Data," Congressional Research Service, November 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Andrea Wilkins, "Time Limited TANF Recipients," NCSL, July 2002.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



# APPENDIX 5 – FEDERAL WELFARE REAUTHORIZATION

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## Components of H.R. 4

	<b>Requirements</b>
<b>Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retains block grant funding at the current \$16.5 billion level through 2007.</li> </ul>
<b>Participation Standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By 2007, states will be penalized unless 70 percent of families are participating in certain work-related activities 40 hours a week.</li> <li>• This is an increase from the current requirement of 50 percent participating in a broad range of work related activities for 30 hours a week. Participation will increase 5 percent each year from the current 50 percent rate.</li> </ul>
<b>Change In Countable Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires participants to spend the first 24 hours of work in strictly defined work activities: unsubsidized employment, subsidized public or private sector employment, on-the-job training, supervised work or community experience. This is a change from current law, which allows a range of activities as countable towards meeting participation standards.</li> <li>• The new total weekly requirement is 40 hours a week—an increase from the current 30-hour requirement (35 for two-parent families).</li> <li>• Allows states to count training or education during the client’s first three months towards the first 24 hours of participation. Following 3 months (or any three months in a cumulative 2-year period), any participation less than 24 hours a week in the described work activities does not count at all.</li> </ul>
<b>Penalties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Penalizes states that do not meet these requirements by removing 5 percent of federal TANF funds, and requires those states to increase their Maintenance of Effort spending by 5 percent.</li> <li>• Families that fail to meet the proposed requirements are cut off of assistance.</li> </ul>

Source: Center for Law and Social Policy, “Side by Side Comparison of Work Provisions in Recent TANF Reauthorization Proposals,” April 8, 2003.



## APPENDIX 6 – AGGRESSIVE ASSESSMENT: CLARKSTON AND COLFAX

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In an effort to expedite assessing barriers that may prohibit a client’s success in the workforce, the Clarkston and Colfax CSOs began conducting a series of workshops for clients with six or more months on TANF. These workshops send a strong message that six months on WorkFirst is a long time, and force clients to evaluate what barriers are preventing them from attaining self-sufficiency. The CSO Administrator explained that placing clients in jobs has not been a problem; however, maintaining clients’ employment has been challenging. Two workshops are conducted each month to identify issues early, and address issues that would prevent a client from finding and maintaining a job. TANF Workshops include:

- **Assessment** — Local partners assess substance abuse problems, literacy level, and provide information on domestic violence issues and educational opportunities available through the local community college. The CSO reports that early results of assessments reveal that as many as 75 percent of clients have substance abuse issues in their household.
- **Resiliency** — Local partners assess interpersonal skills and train clients on getting along with others.
- **Esteem** — Clients examine how their decisions and actions affect how they live. After a critical self-examination, the workshop identifies clients’ strengths, and works to build self-esteem.
- **Job Skills** — Participants learn about finding and keeping a job.
- **Healthy Relationships** — Helps clients build skills necessary to recognize good and bad relationships. In addition, they identify and learn appropriate workplace behavior.
- **Job Support** — Intended for clients who are in intensive job search. Addresses issues that may arise after beginning a job, and offers clients the opportunity to participate in a support group.