

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1499

As Passed House:
February 28, 2023

Title: An act relating to food assistance funding.

Brief Description: Concerning food assistance funding.

Sponsors: House Committee on Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning (originally sponsored by Representatives Shavers, Ramel, Santos, Leavitt, Gregerson, Bateman, Ormsby, Doglio, Pollet, Reed, Ortiz-Self, Stonier and Fosse).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning: 2/1/23, 2/10/23 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/28/23, 95-2.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Provides that the Washington State Department of Agriculture, in administering food assistance program funding, may not restrict the amount of funding provided to food banks that may be used for essential nonfood items to less than 25 percent of total funding.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, YOUTH, & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Cortes, Vice Chair; Taylor, Vice Chair; Eslick, Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Callan, Goodman, Ortiz-Self and Rule.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Dent and Walsh.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) administers funding for various food assistance programs. This includes the state Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) and the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which provide support to food banks and food pantries.

In administering the TEFAP for the state, the WSDA receives food and operational funding from the United States Department of Agriculture for distribution to 19 lead contractors statewide. These contractors provide food to food banks, food pantries, shelters, and meal providers in Washington.

Through the EFAP, the WSDA awards funds to lead contractors in each county who work with local food banks and food pantries to distribute funding for local emergency food networks. Funding may pay for administrative costs; operational costs such as rent, salaries, gasoline for vehicles, and supplies; purchase of food; nutrition training for staff and clients; and equipment purchases and repairs. Listed essential nonfood items may be purchased with EFAP funds, but these purchases cannot exceed 10 percent of the allocation.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

In administering food assistance program funding, the WSDA may not restrict the amount of funding provided to food banks that may be used for essential nonfood items, including diapers, feminine products, and hygiene products, to less than 25 percent of total funding.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This change will provide more flexibility to food banks. Food banks were forced to quickly adapt to soaring demands during the COVID-19 pandemic, and families are still experiencing food insecurity at high levels. With the rising cost of housing and commodities, the high demand is likely to be sustained. Existing policy limits funding for essential nonfood items. Removing this restriction will enable food banks to adapt to meet immediate needs.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The EFAP is foundational for the hunger relief system. The WSDA is in the process of evaluating the program to ensure it is meeting community and stakeholder needs. Many categories of people are experiencing food insecurity, including students, teachers, parents, military families, and many others. Food inventories are the lowest they have ever been. Food banks and food pantries are struggling to keep up with need, so any support that can be given to these organizations is beneficial.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Clyde Shavers, prime sponsor.

(Other) Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.