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H.B. No. 1483

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to a pilot program for assisting certain recipients of public benefits to gain permanent self-sufficiency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subchapter B, Chapter 531, Government Code, is amended by adding Section 531.02241 to read as follows:

Sec. 531.02241. PILOT PROGRAM FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF CERTAIN PERSONS RECEIVING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OR SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE BENEFITS. (a) In this section:

(1) "Financial assistance benefits" means money payments under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program operated under Chapter 31, Human Resources Code, or under the state temporary assistance and support services program operated under Chapter 34, Human Resources Code.

(2) "Self-sufficiency" means being employed in a position that pays a sufficient wage, having financial savings in an amount that is equal to at least \$1,000 per member of a family's household, and maintaining a debt-to-income ratio that does not exceed 43 percent.

(3) "Slow reduction scale" means a graduated plan for reducing financial assistance or supplemental nutrition assistance benefits that correlates with a phase of the pilot program's progressive stages toward self-sufficiency.

(4) "Sufficient wage" means an amount of money,

1 determined by a market-based calculation that uses geographically  
2 specific expenditure data, that is sufficient to meet a family's  
3 minimum necessary spending on basic needs, including food, child  
4 care, health insurance, housing, and transportation.

5 (5) "Supplemental nutrition assistance benefits"  
6 means money payments under the supplemental nutrition assistance  
7 program operated under Chapter 33, Human Resources Code.

8 (b) The commission shall develop and implement a pilot  
9 program for assisting not more than 500 eligible families to gain  
10 permanent self-sufficiency and no longer require financial  
11 assistance, supplemental nutrition assistance, or other  
12 means-tested public benefits, notwithstanding the limitations and  
13 requirements of Section 31.043, Human Resources Code. If the  
14 number of families participating in the program during a year  
15 reaches capacity for that year as determined by the commission, the  
16 number of families that may be served under the program in the  
17 following year may be increased by 20 percent.

18 (c) The pilot program will test extending, for at least 24  
19 months but not more than 60 months, financial assistance and  
20 supplemental nutrition assistance benefits by waiving the  
21 application of income and asset limit eligibility requirements for  
22 those benefits and the time limits under Section 31.0065, Human  
23 Resources Code, for financial assistance benefits to allow for  
24 continuation of financial assistance and supplemental nutrition  
25 assistance benefits and reduction of the benefits using a slow  
26 reduction scale. The commission shall freeze a participating  
27 family's eligibility status for the benefits beginning on the date

1 the participating family enters the pilot program and ending on the  
2 date the family ceases participating in the program. The waiver of  
3 the application of any asset limit requirement must allow the  
4 family to have assets in an amount that is at least \$1,000 per  
5 member of the family's household.

6 (d) The pilot program must be designed to allow social  
7 services providers, public benefit offices, and other community  
8 partners to refer potential participating families to the program.

9 (e) A family is eligible to participate in the pilot program  
10 established under this section if the family:

11 (1) includes one or more members who are recipients of  
12 financial assistance or supplemental nutrition assistance  
13 benefits, at least one of whom is:

14 (A) at least 18 but not more than 62 years of age;  
15 and

16 (B) willing, and physically and legally able, to  
17 be employed; and

18 (2) has a total household income that is less than a  
19 sufficient wage based on the family's makeup and geographical area  
20 of residence.

21 (f) The pilot program must be designed to assist eligible  
22 participating families in attaining self-sufficiency by:

23 (1) identifying eligibility requirements for the  
24 continuation of financial assistance or supplemental nutrition  
25 assistance benefits and time limits for the benefits, the  
26 application of which may be waived for a limited period and that, if  
27 applied, would impede self-sufficiency;

1           (2) implementing strategies, including waiving the  
2 application of the eligibility requirements and time limits  
3 identified in Subdivision (1), to remove barriers to  
4 self-sufficiency; and

5           (3) moving eligible participating families through  
6 progressive stages toward self-sufficiency that include the  
7 following phases:

8           (A) an initial phase in which a family moves out  
9 of an emergent crisis by securing housing, medical care, and  
10 financial assistance and supplemental nutrition assistance  
11 benefits, as necessary;

12           (B) a second phase in which:

13           (i) the family moves toward stability by  
14 securing employment and, if necessary, child care and by  
15 participating in services that build the financial management  
16 skills necessary to meet financial goals; and

17           (ii) the family's financial assistance and  
18 supplemental nutrition assistance benefits are reduced according  
19 to the following scale:

20           (a) on reaching 25 percent of the  
21 family's sufficient wage, the amount of benefits is reduced by 10  
22 percent;

23           (b) on reaching 50 percent of the  
24 family's sufficient wage, the amount of benefits is reduced by 25  
25 percent; and

26           (c) on reaching 75 percent of the  
27 family's sufficient wage, the amount of benefits is reduced by 50

1 percent;

2 (C) a third phase in which the family:

3 (i) transitions to self-sufficiency by  
4 securing employment that pays a sufficient wage, reducing debt, and  
5 building savings; and

6 (ii) becomes ineligible for financial  
7 assistance and supplemental nutrition assistance benefits on  
8 reaching 100 percent of the family's sufficient wage; and

9 (D) a final phase in which the family attains  
10 self-sufficiency by retaining employment that pays a sufficient  
11 wage, amassing at least \$1,000 per member of the family's  
12 household, and having manageable debt so that the family will no  
13 longer be dependent on financial assistance, supplemental  
14 nutrition assistance, or other means-tested public benefits for at  
15 least six months following the date the family stops participating  
16 in the program.

17 (g) A person from a family that wishes to participate in the  
18 pilot program must attend an in-person intake meeting with a  
19 program case manager. During the intake meeting the case manager  
20 shall:

21 (1) determine whether:

22 (A) the person's family meets the eligibility  
23 requirements under Subsection (e); and

24 (B) the application of income or asset limit  
25 eligibility requirements for continuation of financial assistance  
26 and supplemental nutrition assistance benefits and the time limits  
27 under Section 31.0065, Human Resources Code, for financial

- 1 assistance benefits may be waived under the program;  
2 (2) review the family's demographic information and  
3 household financial budget;  
4 (3) assess the family members' current financial and  
5 career situations;  
6 (4) collaborate with the person to develop and  
7 implement strategies for removing barriers to the family attaining  
8 self-sufficiency, including waiving the application of income and  
9 asset limit eligibility requirements and time limits described by  
10 Subdivision (1)(B) to allow for continuation of financial  
11 assistance and supplemental nutrition assistance benefits; and  
12 (5) if the person's family is determined to be eligible  
13 for and chooses to participate in the program, schedule a follow-up  
14 meeting to further assess the family's crisis, review available  
15 referral services, and create a service plan.  
16 (h) A participating family must be assigned a program case  
17 manager who shall:  
18 (1) if the family is determined to be eligible,  
19 provide the family with a verification of the waived application of  
20 asset, income, and time limits described by Subsection (c),  
21 allowing the family to continue receiving financial assistance and  
22 supplemental nutrition assistance benefits on a slow reduction  
23 scale;  
24 (2) assess, at the follow-up meeting scheduled under  
25 Subsection (g)(5), the family's crisis, review available referral  
26 services, and create a service plan; and  
27 (3) during the initial phase of the program, create

1 medium- and long-term goals consistent with the strategies  
2 developed under Subsection (g)(4).

3 (i) The pilot program must provide each participating  
4 family placed in the research group described by Subsection  
5 (j)(3)(C) with holistic, wraparound case management services that  
6 meet all applicable program requirements under 7 C.F.R. Section  
7 273.7(e) or 45 C.F.R. Section 261.10, as applicable. Case  
8 management services provided under this subsection must include the  
9 strategic use of financial assistance and supplemental nutrition  
10 assistance benefits to ensure that the goals included in the  
11 family's service plan are achieved. The wraparound case management  
12 services must be provided through a community-based provider.

13 (j) The pilot program must operate for at least 24 months.  
14 The program shall also include 16 additional months for:

15 (1) planning and designing the program before the  
16 program begins operation;

17 (2) recruiting eligible families to participate in the  
18 program;

19 (3) randomly placing each participating family in one  
20 of at least three research groups, including:

21 (A) a control group;

22 (B) a group consisting of families for whom the  
23 application of income, asset, and time limits described by  
24 Subsection (c) is waived; and

25 (C) a group consisting of families for whom the  
26 application of income, asset, and time limits described by  
27 Subsection (c) is waived and who receive wraparound case management

1 services under the program; and

2 (4) after the program begins operation, collecting and  
3 sharing data that allows for:

4 (A) obtaining participating families'  
5 eligibility and identification data before a family is randomly  
6 placed in a research group under Subdivision (3);

7 (B) conducting surveys or interviews of  
8 participating families to obtain information that is not contained  
9 in records related to a family's eligibility for financial  
10 assistance, supplemental nutrition assistance, or other  
11 means-tested public benefits;

12 (C) providing quarterly reports for not more than  
13 60 months after a participating family is enrolled in the pilot  
14 program regarding the program's effect on the family's labor market  
15 participation and income and need for means-tested public benefits;

16 (D) assessing the interaction of the program's  
17 components with the desired outcomes of the program using data  
18 collected during the program and data obtained from state agencies  
19 concerning means-tested public benefits; and

20 (E) a third party to conduct a rigorous  
21 experimental impact evaluation of the pilot program.

22 (k) The commission shall develop and implement the pilot  
23 program with the assistance of the Texas Workforce Commission,  
24 local workforce development boards, faith-based and other relevant  
25 public or private organizations, and any other entity or person the  
26 commission determines appropriate.

27 (l) The commission shall monitor and evaluate the pilot



1 program in a manner that allows for promoting research-informed  
2 results of the program.

3 (m) On the conclusion of the pilot program but not later  
4 than 48 months following the date the last participating family is  
5 enrolled in the program, the commission shall report to the  
6 legislature on the results of the program. The report must include:

7 (1) an evaluation of the program's effect on  
8 participating families in achieving self-sufficiency and no longer  
9 requiring means-tested public benefits;

10 (2) the impact to this state on the costs of the  
11 financial assistance and supplemental nutrition assistance  
12 programs and of the child-care services program operated by the  
13 Texas Workforce Commission;

14 (3) a cost-benefit analysis of the program; and

15 (4) recommendations on the feasibility and  
16 continuation of the program.

17 (n) During the operation of the pilot program, the  
18 commission shall provide to the legislature additional reports  
19 concerning the program that the commission determines to be  
20 appropriate.

21 (o) The executive commissioner and the Texas Workforce  
22 Commission may adopt rules to implement this section.

23 (p) This section expires September 1, 2026.

24 SECTION 2. If before implementing any provision of this Act  
25 a state agency determines that a waiver or authorization from a  
26 federal agency is necessary for implementation of that provision,  
27 the agency affected by the provision shall request the waiver or

1 authorization and may delay implementing that provision until the  
2 waiver or authorization is granted.

3 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives  
4 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as  
5 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this  
6 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this  
7 Act takes effect September 1, 2019.