

Sponsor Statement for HB 402

"An Act relating Welfare Reform"

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Representative Fred Dyson, Chair

While the [Department of Public Assistance](#) has made strides in the application of welfare reform, lessons have been learned, and insight has been gained, that led us to propose a tune-up of public assistance.

The intent of [HB 402](#) is to align department program operations with the work-first philosophy that has been held up by all of us as the goal. One of the key premises of this philosophy is that the labor market is the best test of an individual's employability. Another is that **all** individuals are capable of moving themselves and their families toward self-sufficiency. A third is that "real job" experience is the best way to specifically identify training needs.

HB 402 has made changes that in general terms:

- Implement a broader and more responsive diversion process to assist families to avoid dependency on cash benefits;
- Strengthen the "up-front message" to clients that public assistance is as much about employment as it is about providing cash benefits;
- Provide more consistent guidance with regard to assessment, emphasizing the utilization of the labor market as the best test of employability and a family strength-based approach versus an approach that emphasizes pre-determining family barriers;
- Implement a more complete subsidized wage program and expanding community service for those unable to obtain unsubsidized employment.