PROVIDING FOOD AND CASH TO FIGHT HUNGER & POVERTY (HB 1151)

Key benefits:

**Helps Washington families regain stability** through the wake of the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and future emergencies.

**Prevents food insecurity** by mitigating the “cliff effect” that occurs when a family no longer qualifies for assistance.

**Expands financial assistance tools during emergencies** to help Washingtonians who are not eligible for other supports to meet their basic needs.

**Responds to the recommendations from members of the Governor’s Poverty Reduction Workgroup** – people who have lived with poverty are experts in what works – and what doesn’t – in the programs designed to provide economic stability and opportunity.

Last updated in 1991, it modernizes the standards for cash assistance programs so the real costs of what households actually need to meet their basic needs is built into our programs.

What does the bill do?

**Transitional Food Assistance** helps prevent food insecurity and mitigates the “cliff effect” that occurs when a family no longer qualifies for assistance – either because they exceed the income limit or are no longer eligible. Currently only families leaving TANF are eligible - HB 1151 would extend eligibility for Transitional Assistance to households with children leaving food stamps –a modest one-time cash benefit and 5 months of transitional food assistance (SNAP/FAP) provides an ‘off ramp’ rather than a cliff when a family’s circumstances change. Start date: July 1, 2022

**Disaster Cash Assistance Program** provides a one-time cash benefit within a 12-month period during a declared emergency - yet COVID has shown that some emergencies last a very long time, leaving vulnerable people without income to make ends meet. HB 1151 allows households to get help more than once in a 12-month period during a Governor-declared emergency.

Washington requires that the “standard of need” for cash assistance programs is updated annually to set benefit levels for programs like TANF. The need standard estimates the costs of common household goods and services, but this standard was created in 1991 – and it doesn’t include basics like child care or utilities. **HB 1151 modernizes** this outdated standard to reflect the real costs of meeting basic needs in Washington.

Why is this bill important now?

**HB 1151** helps Washington families regain stability in wake of the economic upheaval caused by COVID-19. It responds to poverty-reduction recommendations of both the Legislative-Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Oversight Task Force and the Governor’s Poverty Reduction Workgroup, comprised of Washingtonians with lived experience of poverty. It advances policies that: a) provide cash assistance during emergencies; b) provide a smooth off-ramp from assistance programs to help mitigate the “cliff effect” that occurs when a family no longer qualifies for assistance; and c) ensuring programs respond to the realities of poverty and reflect the real costs of what it takes to make ends meet in our state.

How much will this cost?

Estimated to be $989,000 in the 2021-23 biennium, which includes one-time automation costs. Most of the food assistance costs would be paid through federal SNAP funds.