

H.790

An act relating to Reach Up eligibility

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 33 V.S.A. § 1103 is amended to read:

§ 1103. ELIGIBILITY AND BENEFIT LEVELS

(a) Financial assistance shall be given for the benefit of a dependent child to the relative or caretaker with whom the child is living unless otherwise provided. The amount of financial assistance to which an eligible person is entitled shall be determined with due regard to the income, resources, and maintenance available to that person and, as far as funds are available, shall provide that person a reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health. The Commissioner may fix by regulation maximum amounts of financial assistance, and act to ~~insure~~ ensure that the expenditures for the programs shall not exceed appropriations for them consistent with section 101 of this title. In no case may the Department expend State funds in excess of the appropriations for the programs under this chapter.

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(c) The Commissioner shall adopt rules for the determination of eligibility for the Reach Up program and benefit levels for all participating families that include the following provisions:

(1) No less than the first ~~\$200.00~~ \$300.00 per month of earnings from an unsubsidized job and ~~25~~ 50 percent of the remaining unsubsidized earnings shall be disregarded in determining the amount of the family's financial assistance grant. The family shall receive the difference between countable income and the Reach Up payment standard in a partial financial assistance grant.

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(5) ~~The Up to \$5,000.00 of the~~ value of assets accumulated from the earnings of adults and children in participating families and ~~from the value of~~ any federal or Vermont earned income tax credit shall be excluded for purposes of determining continuing eligibility for the Reach Up program. ~~The asset limitation shall be increased from \$1,000.00 to \$2,000.00 for participating families for the purposes of determining continuing eligibility for the Reach Up program.~~

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Sec. 2. 33 V.S.A. § 1107(a) is amended to read:

(a)(1) The Commissioner shall provide all Reach Up services to participating families through a case management model informed by knowledge of the family's home, community, employment, and available resources. Services may be delivered in the district office, the family's home, or community in a way that facilitates progress toward accomplishment of the

family development plan. Case management may be provided to other eligible families. The case manager, with the full involvement of the family, shall recommend, and the Commissioner shall modify as necessary a family development plan established under the Reach First or Reach Up program for each participating family, with a right of appeal as provided by section 1132 of this title. A case manager shall be assigned to each participating family as soon as the family begins to receive financial assistance. If administratively feasible and appropriate, the case manager shall be the same case manager the family was assigned in the Reach First program. The applicant for or recipient of financial assistance, under this chapter, shall have the burden of demonstrating the existence of his or her condition.

(2) In addition to the services provided pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, the Commissioner shall provide for a mandatory case review for each participating family with a program director or the program director's designee when the family reaches 18 and 36 months of enrollment, respectively, in the Reach Up program to assess whether the participating family:

(A) is in compliance with a family development plan or work requirement;

(B) is properly claiming a deferment, if applicable; ~~and~~

(C) has any unaddressed barriers to self-sufficiency and, if so, how those barriers may be better addressed by the Department for Children and Families or other State programs; and

(D) has additional opportunities to achieve earned income through the program without a corresponding loss of benefits.

(3) The case manager shall meet with each participating family following any statutory or rule changes affecting the amount of the earned income disregard, asset limitations, or other eligibility or benefit criteria in the Reach Up program to inform the family of the changes and advise the family about ways to maximize the opportunities to achieve earned income without a corresponding loss of benefits.

Sec. 3. 33 V.S.A. § 1204 is amended to read:

§ 1204. FOOD ASSISTANCE

(a) An eligible family shall receive monthly food assistance equal to ~~\$100.00~~ \$50.00 to be applied to the family's electronic benefit transfer (EBT) food account ~~for the first six months after the family has become eligible for Reach Ahead. For the seventh through 12th months, the family shall receive a monthly food assistance of \$50.00~~ while the family is eligible for Reach Ahead.

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Sec. 4. RULEMAKING; OFFSET FOR EARNED INCOME DISREGARD

(a) In order to effect the increased earned income disregard established by this act and to make its impact fiscally neutral, the Commissioner for Children and Families shall amend the rules governing the Reach Up program pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 to authorize the Department to:

(1) calculate an annual adjustment to Reach Up grants, excluding exempt grants, that accounts for the difference between an earned income disregard of the first \$200.00 earned per month from an unsubsidized job in addition to 25 percent of the remaining unsubsidized earnings and the first \$300.00 earned per month from an unsubsidized job in addition to 50 percent of the remaining unsubsidized earnings, which may be adjusted downward based on appropriated resources and projected program costs; and

(2) apply the adjustment described in subdivision (1) of this subsection to all Reach Up grants, excluding exempt grants, after need and benefit determinations are calculated.

(b) As used in this section, “exempt grants” means grants to children in the care of a person other than their parents and grants to participating families when a single parent or both parents receive Supplemental Security Income.

Sec. 5. EFFECTIVE DATES

(a) Except for Secs. 1 and 3, this act shall take effect on July 1, 2014.

(b) Except for Sec. 1(c)(1), Secs. 1 and 3 shall take effect on October 1, 2014.

(c) Sec. 1(c)(1) shall take effect on July 1, 2015.