

Senate Committees on Appropriations. When the General Assembly is not in session, the Agency shall provide its report to the Joint Fiscal Committee.

Sec. E.323 33 V.S.A. § 1107 is amended to read:

§ 1107. CASE MANAGEMENT; FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PLANS;
COORDINATED SERVICES

(a)(1) The ~~commissioner~~ 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~~ 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.

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Sec. E.323.1 33 V.S.A. § 1108 is amended to read:

§ 1108. ~~OBLIGATION TO ASSIST ELIGIBLE FAMILIES WITH~~

~~DEPENDENT CHILDREN~~ LIMITS ON FAMILY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

~~Except as specifically authorized herein, the commissioner shall not adopt any rule that would result in the termination of financial assistance to a participating family, including a dependent child, on the basis of an adult family member's having received TANF-funded financial assistance, as an adult, for 60 or more months in his or her lifetime. This provision shall not prevent the commissioner from adopting rules that impose limitations on how~~

~~many months that families, including a parent who has received an associate or bachelor's degree while receiving support from the postsecondary education program authorized by section 1121 of this chapter, may receive financial assistance authorized by this chapter in the five-year period immediately following the receipt of such associate or bachelor's degree.~~

(a) Except for grants to children in the care of persons other than their parents, only participating families who have received fewer than 60 cumulative months of financial assistance, including those months in which any type of cash assistance funded by a TANF block grant was received in other states or territories of the United States, shall be eligible for benefits under the Reach Up program.

(b) Deferment granted for the following reasons shall not count toward the Reach Up program's cumulative 60-month lifetime eligibility period:

(1) The participant is not able-to-work.

(2) The participant is a parent or caretaker who is caring for a child during the first year of a possible two-year deferment pursuant to subdivision 1114(b)(3) of this chapter.

(3) The participant is affected by domestic violence pursuant to subdivision 1114(b)(9) of this chapter.

(4) The participant is needed in the home on a full-time basis to care for an ill or disabled parent, spouse, or child pursuant to subdivision 1114(b)(5) of this chapter.

(c) The cumulative 60-month lifetime eligibility period shall not begin to toll until the parent or parents of a participating family have reached the age of 18.

(d) Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section, a participating family that does not have a qualifying deferment under section 1114 of this title and that has exceeded the cumulative 60-month lifetime eligibility period set forth in subsection (a) of this section shall qualify for a hardship exemption that allows the adult member of the participating family to receive:

(1) a wage equivalent to that of the participating family's cash benefit under the Reach Up program for participation in community service employment; or

(2) supplemental benefits to the wages of the adult member of the participating family if the work requirement is otherwise being met.

Sec. E.323.2 33 V.S.A. § 1114 is amended to read:

§ 1114. DEFERMENTS, MODIFICATIONS, AND REFERRAL

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(b) The work requirements shall be either modified or deferred for:

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(5) A participant who is needed in the home on a full or part-time basis in order to care for an ill or disabled parent, spouse, or child. In granting deferments, the ~~department~~ Department shall fully consider the participant's preference as to the number of hours the participant is able to leave home to

participate in work activities. A deferral or modification of the work requirement exceeding 60 days due to the existence of illness or disability pursuant to this subdivision shall be confirmed by the independent medical review of one or more physicians designated by the Secretary of Human Services prior to receipt of continued financial assistance under the Reach Up program.

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(d) Absent an apparent condition or claimed physical, emotional, or mental condition, participants are presumed to be able-to-work. A participant shall have the burden of demonstrating the existence of the ~~circumstances or~~ condition asserted as the basis for a deferral or modification of the work requirement. A deferral or modification of the work requirement exceeding 60 days due to the existence of conditions rendering the participant unable-to-work shall be confirmed by the independent medical review of one or more physicians designated by the Secretary of Human Services prior to receipt of continued financial assistance under the Reach Up program.

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Sec. E.323.3 INTERIM REACH UP CASE MANAGEMENT

(a) During the interim between passage of this act and the implementation of the cumulative 60-month lifetime eligibility period pursuant to section E.323.1 of this act on May 1, 2014, the Commissioner for Children and Families shall:

(1) ensure that each participating family has a designated case manager who is primarily accountable for the family's progress in the Reach Up program; and

(2) conduct a case review of each participating family that has reached the cumulative 60-month lifetime eligibility period pursuant to section E.323.1 of this act, beginning with families under sanction, to understand better the profile of families receiving long-term assistance.

(b) On or before January 15, 2014, the Commissioner shall submit a written report to the House Committees on Appropriations and on Human Services and to the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare regarding:

(1) the Department's preparedness to implement the cumulative 60-month lifetime eligibility period pursuant to Sec. E.323.1 of this act;

(2) the aggregated profile of participating families receiving long-term assistance from the Reach Up program pursuant to subdivision (a)(2) of this section, including any common barriers that prevent participating families from moving to self-sufficiency;

(3) the anticipated impact on participating families reaching the cumulative 60-month lifetime eligibility period pursuant to section E.323.1 of this act; and

(4) the fiscal impact of changes made to the Reach Up program in accordance with this act.

(c) On or before February 15, 2015, the Commissioner shall report to the General Assembly on the status of families 60 days after the family becomes ineligible for the Reach Up program pursuant to subsection E.323.1(a) of this act.

Sec. E.323.4 33 V.S.A. § 1116(e) is amended to read:

~~(e) Any family that has received 60 or more cumulative months of financial assistance that also has one or more adult participants who have been sanctioned for 12 or more cumulative months, and who are currently being sanctioned shall have their grant reduced by \$225.00 per month for each adult sanctioned under this subsection. [Repealed.]~~

Sec. E.323.5 33 V.S.A. § 1122(i) is added to read:

(i) The Department shall offer written and verbal information pertaining to postsecondary education to an appropriate Reach Up participant based on the participant's assessment.

Sec. E.323.6 REACH UP POLICY WORK GROUP

(a) It is the policy of the State of Vermont that:

(1) parents and guardians take primary responsibility for the care and financial support of their children;

(2) parents and guardians model self-sufficient behavior and personal responsibility for their children by availing themselves of employment and educational opportunities when possible; and

(3) the system of aid and services to needy families with children shall recognize clearly defined reciprocal responsibilities and obligations on the part of both parents and government.

(b) The Commissioner for Children and Families shall convene a work group to examine public policy options for restructuring the Reach Up program in a manner that emphasizes participant responsibility for receipt of benefits.

The Work Group shall:

(1) assess the effectiveness of the Reach Up program in meeting the purposes outlined in 33 V.S.A. § 1102;

(2) identify programmatic strengths or weaknesses in the Reach Up program, including a review of and recommendations pertaining to the State's existing sanction policies, work requirements for two-parent families, and deferment standards to ensure statewide consistency in application;

(3) assess the effectiveness of the State and providers under contract with the State in administering the Reach Up program;

(4) identify the average caseload per case manager and assess the efficacy of case management services provided to Reach Up participants, including the training provided to case managers and requisite skills for performing case management responsibilities;

(5) evaluate whether the skills of the Department of Labor's Reach Up case managers would be better used in providing job placement and workforce development services to Reach Up participants;

(6) examine the Reach Up program's alignment with the Agency of Human Services' Integrated Family Services initiative;

(7) assess the availability and adequacy of education and training programs for Reach Up participants;

(8) survey successful models used by other states' Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs that emphasize participant responsibility;

(9) consider the feasibility and effectiveness of incorporating restorative justice principles into the Reach Up program through the involvement of Vermont's community justice centers;

(10) assess whether the State should maintain the exemption to 21 U.S.C. § 862a (denial of assistance and benefits for certain drug-related convictions) in 33 V.S.A. § 1103; and

(11) evaluate the coordination between the Reach Up program and other state and community services that provide assistance pertaining to housing, employment, transportation, or mental health and substance abuse.

(c)(1) The Commissioner, who shall serve as Chair, shall select individuals with policy expertise related to TANF, child welfare, child development, substance abuse, and workforce development issues to serve on the Work Group, as well as a current or former participating parent of the Reach Up program. The Commissioner may also select national consultants or experts to serve on or assist the Work Group. The Work Group shall seek input from

Vermont advocates for children and families prior to finalizing its findings and recommendations.

(2) The Commissioner shall convene the first meeting of the Work Group on or before July 15, 2013.

(d) On or before November 1, 2013, the Work Group shall submit a written report to the General Assembly containing its findings and recommendations on each of the issues identified in subsection (b) of this section. The report shall also contain a proposal for restructuring the Reach Up Program in a manner that is cost-effective, is consistent with federal law, and empowers participants to attain self-sustaining employment. Thereafter, the Work Group shall cease to exist.

(e) Members of the Work Group who are not state employees and who are not otherwise compensated by their employment or association for their participation shall be entitled to per diem compensation as provided in 32 V.S.A. § 1010.

Sec. E.323.7 REACH UP; REALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

(a) Up to \$300,000 of the funds formerly budgeted within the Reach Up program for transfer to Vocational Rehabilitation and subsequently to the Department of Labor may be reallocated, including a transfer through the Global Commitment waiver by the Commissioner for Children and Families with the approval of the Secretary of Human Services and the Commissioner of Finance and Management. The funds shall be used to address substance

abuse and mental health as a barrier to employment for Reach Up participants. The Commissioner for Children and Families shall report to the Joint Fiscal Committee in November 2013 on the proposed use of these funds, specifically with regard to the amount allocated for treatment, therapy, and case management. The Department for Children and Families shall report on the number and status of families served with these funds. The Department for Children and Families may seek further reallocation of these funds in the budget adjustment process if doing so comports with the recommendations required by Secs. E.300.1 (Substance Abuse Continuum) and E.323.6 (Reach Up Policy Work Group) of this act.

Sec. E.324 HOME HEATING FUEL ASSISTANCE/LIHEAP

(a) For the purpose of a crisis set-aside, for seasonal home heating fuel assistance through December 31, 2013, and for program administration, the Commissioner of Finance and Management shall transfer \$2,550,000 from the Home Weatherization Assistance Trust Fund to the Home Heating Fuel Assistance Fund to the extent that federal LIHEAP or similar federal funds are not available. An equivalent amount shall be returned to the Home Weatherization Trust Fund from the Home Heating Fuel Assistance Fund to the extent that federal LIHEAP or similar federal funds are received. Should a transfer of funds from the Home Weatherization Assistance Trust Fund be necessary for the 2013–2014 crisis set-aside and for seasonal home heating fuel assistance through December 31, 2013 and if LIHEAP funds awarded as