

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Health and Welfare to which was referred House Bill
3 No. 790 entitled “An act relating to Reach Up eligibility” respectfully reports
4 that it has considered the same and recommends that the Senate propose to the
5 House that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and
6 inserting in lieu thereof the following:

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

8 § 1103. ELIGIBILITY AND BENEFIT LEVELS

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

20 * * *

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

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

10 * * *

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

17 * * *

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

19 (a)(1) The Commissioner shall provide all Reach Up services to
20 participating families through a case management model informed by
21 knowledge of the family's home, community, employment, and available

1 resources. Services may be delivered in the district office, the family's home,
2 or community in a way that facilitates progress toward accomplishment of the
3 family development plan. Case management may be provided to other eligible
4 families. The case manager, with the full involvement of the family, shall
5 recommend, and the Commissioner shall modify as necessary a family
6 development plan established under the Reach First or Reach Up program for
7 each participating family, with a right of appeal as provided by section 1132 of
8 this title. A case manager shall be assigned to each participating family as
9 soon as the family begins to receive financial assistance. If administratively
10 feasible and appropriate, the case manager shall be the same case manager the
11 family was assigned in the Reach First program. The applicant for or recipient
12 of financial assistance, under this chapter, shall have the burden of
13 demonstrating the existence of his or her condition.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 § 1204. FOOD ASSISTANCE

14 (a) An eligible family shall receive monthly food assistance equal to
15 ~~\$100.00~~ \$50.00 to be applied to the family's electronic benefit transfer (EBT)
16 food account ~~for the first six months after the family has become eligible for~~
17 ~~Reach Ahead. For the seventh through 12th months, the family shall receive a~~
18 ~~monthly food assistance of \$50.00~~ while the family is eligible for the 12-month
19 Reach Ahead program.

20 * * *

1 **Sec. 4. REACH AHEAD; GRANDFATHER PROVISION**

2 Notwithstanding 33 V.S.A. § 1204(a), any family within the first six months
3 of its participation in the Reach Ahead program on October 1, 2014 shall
4 continue to receive monthly food assistance equal to \$100.00 until its seventh
5 month of participation in the program at which time it shall receive monthly
6 food assistance equal to \$50.00.

7 **Sec. 5. RULEMAKING; OFFSET FOR EARNED INCOME DISREGARD**

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

12 (1) calculate an annual adjustment to Reach Up grants, excluding
13 exempt grants, that accounts for the difference between an earned income
14 disregard of the first \$200.00 earned per month from an unsubsidized job in
15 addition to 25 percent of the remaining unsubsidized earnings and the first
16 \$300.00 earned per month from an unsubsidized job in addition to 50 percent
17 of the remaining unsubsidized earnings, that:

18 (A) shall first be adjusted downward based on any projected program
19 cost reduction associated with caseload estimates below the level appropriated
20 for fiscal year 2015; and

1 (B) may be further adjusted downward based on appropriated
2 resources and projected program costs; and

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

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

9 **Sec. 6. BUDGET PRESENTATION**

10 The Department for Children and Families shall include as part of its fiscal
11 year 2016 budget presentation to the General Assembly a preliminary estimate
12 of the annual adjustment calculated pursuant to Sec. 5(a)(1) of this act and the
13 projected program cost reduction associated with caseload estimates below the
14 level appropriated for fiscal year 2015.

15 **Sec. 7. EFFECTIVE DATES**

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

17 (b) Except for Sec. 1(c)(1), Secs. 1 and 3 shall take effect on October 1,
18 2014.

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

20 and that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: “An act relating
21 to Reach Up eligibility and benefit levels”.

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2

3 (Committee vote: _____)

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Senator _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE