

§3790. Parents as Scholars Program

1. Established. The department shall establish a student financial aid program based on need for up to 2000 participants known as the Parents as Scholars Program, referred to in this section as the "program," to aid needy students who have dependent children and who are matriculating in postsecondary undergraduate 2-year and 4-year degree-granting education programs. Enrollees in the program must be provided with a package of student aid that includes aid for living expenses equivalent to that provided pursuant to chapter 1053-B, medical assistance pursuant to chapter 855 and services and benefits at least equivalent to those provided pursuant to chapter 1054-A and to participants in the Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment Program pursuant to chapter 1054-C. A family that ceases to receive aid under this chapter as a result of increased child support or increased hours of, or increased income from, employment is eligible to receive transitional support services in accordance with section 3762, subsection 8. The program must be supported with funds other than federal block grant funds provided under the United States Social Security Act, Title IV-A, except that federal funds may be used in accordance with federal law if their use does not result in the imposition of conditions of participation or program requirements other than those established by this chapter. [PL 2021, c. 648, §11 (AMD).]

2. Eligibility criteria. Families that qualify for TANF assistance under chapter 1053-B may apply to participate in the program instead of TANF. Individuals with marketable bachelor's degrees are ineligible for enrollment. Eligibility for and the amount of assistance must be determined in accordance with criteria and procedures used in the TANF program, this chapter and the rules adopted pursuant to this chapter and chapter 1053-B. Individuals applying to the program must be assessed in accordance with the provisions of section 3788. To the extent that program resources and space permit, enrollment in the program must be granted if the assessment results in findings as follows:

A. That the individual does not possess the necessary skills to obtain employment that will enable that individual to support a family at 85% of the median family income in the State for a family of the same size; [PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. B, §1 (NEW).]

B. That, considering potential employment opportunities and local labor market conditions, the postsecondary education sought by the individual will significantly improve the ability of the family to be self-supporting; [PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. NNNNNNN, §15 (AMD).]

C. That the individual has the aptitude to successfully complete the proposed postsecondary program; and [PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. NNNNNNN, §15 (AMD).]

D. That enrollment is for the pursuit of any degree or certification if the occupation has at least an average job outlook as identified by the Center for Workforce Research and Information within the Department of Labor. For occupations with a lower than average job outlook, educational plans require approval of the commissioner or the commissioner's designee. [PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. NNNNNNN, §16 (NEW).]

[PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. NNNNNNN, §§15, 16 (AMD).]

3. Program requirements. An enrollee must participate in a combination of education, training, study or work-site experience for an average of 20 hours per week in the first 24 months of the program. Aid under this chapter may continue beyond 24 months if the enrollee remains in an educational program and agrees to participate in either of the following options:

A. Fifteen hours per week of work-site experience in addition to other education, training or study; or [PL 1999, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]

B. A total of 40 hours of education, training, study or work-site experience. [PL 1999, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]

The department shall present both options to enrollees and permit them to choose either option. For the purpose of this subsection, work-site experience includes, but is not limited to, paid employment, work study, practicums, internships, clinical placements, laboratory or field work directly related to the enrollee's employment goal or any other work activities that, as determined by the department, will enhance the enrollee's employability in the enrollee's field. In the last semester of the enrollee's educational program, work-site experience may also include resume preparation, employment research, interviews and other activities related to job placement.

For the purposes of this subsection, study hours are counted as 3 times the number of hours of classroom instruction, which may include virtual instruction. These study hours are not required to be scheduled or supervised. A participant is deemed to meet the participation requirements of this subsection if the participant, in order to improve the participant's academic performance or to improve the participant's attendance or to more appropriately meet the needs of the participant's family, has chosen to matriculate less than full-time but at least half-time, as defined by acceptance to and official registration of at least a half-time study by the training or educational institution.

The department shall make reasonable adjustments in the participation requirements in this subsection for good cause. For the purpose of this subsection, "good cause" means circumstances in which the required participation would cause the enrollee to seriously compromise academic performance. "Good cause" includes, but is not limited to, a verifiable need to take care of a family member with special needs, a physical or mental health problem, illness, accident, death or a serious personal or family problem that necessitates reduced participation or time off from education, training or work. An enrollee receiving aid under this chapter must make satisfactory progress in the enrollee's educational program. The department shall adopt rules defining satisfactory academic progress. The department may not disapprove an educational plan based solely on the length of the educational program.

[PL 2021, c. 648, §12 (AMD).]

3-A. Coordination with state educational institutions and programs. The department shall deem a referral from an educational institution or program that is part of the University of Maine System; the Maine Community College System; Jobs for Maine's Graduates, established in Title 20-A, chapter 226; an adult education program established in Title 20-A, chapter 315; or the career centers established by the Department of Labor as an application for the Parents as Scholars Program as long as, in accordance with department rules, it is submitted by a qualified person at the institution or program on a form provided by the department for this purpose and signed by the prospective student expressing a desire to enroll in the Parents as Scholars Program. The department shall notify these institutions and programs of the opportunity to refer prospective students in accordance with this subsection and make available to prospective students and these institutions and programs referral forms to serve as an application for purposes of this subsection.

[PL 2019, c. 485, §6 (NEW).]

3-B. Campus-based student support and navigation; working group. The commissioner or the commissioner's designee shall convene a working group to make recommendations to the department regarding the most effective means to establish or supplement personalized professional guidance, support and navigation services for participants in the Parents as Scholars Program in order to promote program completion and student success. The working group includes the Chancellor of the University of Maine System or the chancellor's designees; the President of the Maine Community College System or the president's designees; members of advocacy or other organizations with expertise in policy related to supports and other assistance needed to help adults with low incomes successfully achieve higher education credentials or degrees; low-income students currently or previously enrolled in the University of Maine System or Maine Community College System; and other members determined appropriate by the commissioner. The working group shall also make recommendations to the department as to how the department may best contribute, through administration of the Parents as Scholars Program and the Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment Program established under

chapter 1054-C, to the goal established in Title 26, section 2006, subsection 1, paragraph K. The department shall provide up to \$250,000 annually to educational institutions or programs identified under subsection 3-A to implement services identified to achieve the purposes under this section. These funds must be provided under the TANF block grant available under Title IV-A of the United States Social Security Act. The commissioner or the commissioner's designee shall convene the first meeting of the working group no later than November 1, 2019.

[PL 2019, c. 485, §6 (NEW).]

4. Child support for participating families. A family participating in the program shall assign the right to child support to the department in the same manner as if the family were receiving TANF assistance. The department shall distribute to a family child support collected on behalf of a family in the same manner as if the family were receiving TANF assistance.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. B, §1 (NEW).]

5. Protection from loss of income. To the extent permitted by federal law, aid received under this chapter must be disregarded as income and excluded as a resource or asset to the same extent as assistance under the TANF program under chapters 1053-B and 1054-A for the purposes of any state, federal, tribal or municipal assistance program. Aid received under this chapter must be treated in the same manner as assistance received under the TANF program under chapters 1053-B and 1054-A for all tax purposes.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. B, §1 (NEW).]

6. Maintenance of effort. Aid provided under this chapter may not be paid for with federal funds provided under the United States Social Security Act, Title IV-A, provided that the state funds used for this program may be counted, without penalty, toward the State's federal maintenance of effort requirement.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. B, §1 (NEW).]

7. Rules. The department shall adopt rules to implement this chapter that must be consistent with the rules adopted under chapter 1053-B. Rules adopted pursuant to this section are routine technical rules, as defined by Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter II-A.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. B, §1 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1997, c. 530, §B1 (NEW). PL 1999, c. 407, §1 (AMD). PL 2003, c. 20, §K14 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. NNNNNNN, §§15, 16 (AMD). PL 2019, c. 485, §6 (AMD). PL 2021, c. 648, §§11, 12 (AMD).

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