



Substitute House Bill No. 5360

Public Act No. 10-133

AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN IN THE RECESSION.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) The Child Poverty and Prevention Council, established pursuant to section 4-67x of the general statutes, shall constitute the children in the recession leadership team to make recommendations for the state's emergency response to children affected by the recession. The council may establish a subcommittee to act for it under this section. For purposes of this section, the council or a subcommittee established under this subsection shall meet quarterly if the unemployment rate of the state, as reported by the Labor Commissioner, is eight per cent or greater for the preceding three months.

(b) The council shall work in consultation with other government agencies to develop and promote policies, practices and procedures, within available appropriations, that (1) mitigate the long-term impact of economic recessions on children; (2) provide appropriate assistance and resources to families to minimize the number of children who enter poverty as a result of the recession; and (3) reduce human and fiscal costs of recessions, including foreclosures, child hunger, family violence, school failure, youth runaways, homelessness, child abuse and neglect.

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(c) For purposes of this section, the council, within available appropriations, shall utilize strategies to mitigate the impact of the recession on children that include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) Resource information sharing and strategic planning to address emergency response to children in the recession; (2) training of pertinent personnel on the availability of services, access points and interventions across agencies, including child trauma treatment; (3) development of linkages between job training and education programs and services; (4) development and implementation of efforts to coordinate outreach and improve access to services, including the establishment of multiple enrollment sites where feasible; (5) reduction of current response times to clients for safety net programs, including, but not limited to, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the federal Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children, the National School Lunch Program and other federal child nutrition programs, the temporary family assistance program, the child care subsidy program, heating and rental assistance, eviction prevention services and free and reduced preschool meal programs; (6) identification of appropriate revisions to regulations and procedures to be streamlined to increase program access; (7) maximization of availability of targeted case management and intervention services; (8) assessment of the unique needs of children of soldiers serving or returning from war or other military service; and (9) maximization of all federal funding opportunities.

(d) Not later than January 1, 2011, the council shall prepare a report on (1) the progress in implementing the provisions of this section; and (2) other government actions taken to reduce the impact of the recession on children and families. Such report shall be submitted to the select committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children and to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies and human services.

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Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) The Department of Social Services, in consultation with the Labor Department and the Departments of Education, Public Health and Children and Families, shall seek, within available appropriations, to promote efficiency, reduce costs and administrative error rates and simplify the application process for families eligible for benefits by streamlining and integrating public information and access to programs.

(b) For the purpose of subsection (a) of this section, the Department of Social Services shall develop, within available appropriations, a plan for a comprehensive state service approach that may include (1) the development and promotion of a single, simplified, on-line application and enrollment process for programs administered by the Department of Social Services that serve children or families; (2) the use of the Internet to develop and increase public access to on-line screening tools, benefit calculators and on-line applications that facilitate prompt access to programs administered by the Department of Social Services and benefit information; and (3) the promotion of access to direct assistance with application and enrollment processes through community-based organizations. Not later than January 31, 2011, the department shall submit the plan to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to human services and to the select committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. The department may consult with and accept donations from philanthropic organizations to accomplish the purposes of this section.

(c) The Department of Social Services shall develop, in accordance with the provisions of federal law, a client-friendly application process which shall not require applications to be resubmitted if a family applied for services and, not more than thirty days after the date the application was submitted, the family experienced a change in circumstances or the program closed to intake applications and then

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reopened.

Sec. 3. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) The Department of Social Services shall provide timely public notice if, for any reason, the child care subsidy program closes intake. The department shall notify the public if the program eligibility or status has been altered. Any change in eligibility or program terms, except opening of the program or expansion in eligibility, shall be effective not less than thirty days after public notice of such change.

Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) The Department of Social Services, in consultation with appropriate state agencies and within available appropriations, shall (1) allocate existing funding and resources to ensure the availability of homeless shelters that accept intact families or that assist families to find adequate alternative arrangements that allow the family to remain together; (2) review program eligibility requirements and other policies to ensure that unaccompanied homeless children have access, to the fullest extent practicable, to critical services that such children might otherwise have been prevented from receiving due to age or guardianship requirements; and (3) work, in accordance with state and federal law, to seek relief from income garnishment orders through the appropriate judicial authority if it is deemed appropriate to be in the best interests of children and families.

(b) The Department of Education, in consultation with appropriate departments, shall seek full utilization of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to protect children falling into homelessness from school failure and dropping out of school and to improve access to higher education.

Sec. 5. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) The Departments of Social Services, Public Health and Education shall collaborate to decrease hunger resulting from the recession by coordinating, within available

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appropriations, state-wide public access, information and outreach, and promoting, within available appropriations, cross-referral and collocation of entry points and application processes for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, child nutrition programs and the federal Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children and increase federal reimbursements.

Sec. 6. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2010*) (a) The Department of Education shall administer, within available appropriations, a child nutrition outreach program to increase (1) participation in the federal School Breakfast Program, federal Summer Food Service Program and federal Child and Adult Care Food Program; and (2) federal reimbursement for such programs.

(b) The child nutrition outreach program shall:

(1) Encourage schools to (A) participate in the federal School Breakfast Program; (B) employ innovative breakfast service methods where students eat their breakfast in their classrooms or elsewhere after school starts, rather than only before school and only in the cafeteria; and (C) apply to the in-classroom breakfast grant program pursuant to section 10-215g of the general statutes;

(2) (A) Encourage local and regional school districts to sponsor Summer Food Service Program sites; (B) recruit other sponsors of such sites; and (C) make grants to site sponsors to assist them in increasing child participation;

(3) Encourage day care centers to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program; and

(4) Publicize the availability of federally-funded child nutrition programs throughout the state.

Sec. 7. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) The Department of Social

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Services shall maximize federal fund opportunities from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund established pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act P.L. 111-5, in order to assist families facing unemployment, housing crises, increasing debt, homelessness or other hardships. The department shall seek to utilize, in accordance with the provisions of federal law:

(1) The nonrecurrent, short-term benefits category of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund for eligible purposes, including, but not limited to, housing, transportation, work expenses, family safety, low birth weight reduction, food and nutrition. The benefits funded pursuant to this subdivision may include, but not be limited to, mortgage assistance, eviction relief, car repair, work clothes, domestic violence services, home visitation and on-the-job training; and

(2) The subsidized employment category of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund for eligible purposes, including, but not limited to, youth employment programs and the alleviation of specific labor shortages and state worker shortages where the jobs created help families apply for state services.

(b) The department shall work with the private sector, including philanthropic, business and nonprofit agencies as well as any consortium of such groups, for eligible purposes and as third-party participants to qualify for, access and maximize federal funding from said emergency fund through donation, in-kind spending and training of subsidized workers.

(c) The department shall implement the provisions of this section within available resources.

Sec. 8. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) Not more than sixty days after

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the effective date of this section, the Department of Social Services, within available appropriations and to the extent permitted by federal law, shall establish and implement a procedure for the following modification in the temporary assistance of needy families program whenever the state unemployment rate, as reported by the Labor Commissioner, is eight per cent or greater for the preceding three months. The Jobs First program shall permit and encourage parents to pursue education and training and shall approve, as work activities, two-and four-year degree programs. A recipient shall be eligible for assistance under this modification for at least six months even if the state unemployment rate for subsequent quarters is not eight per cent or greater. The department may seek federal support to pay for such modifications through funds provided from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund.

Sec. 9. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) The Department of Public Health, within available appropriations and in consultation with the Departments of Social Services and Education, shall seek to reduce the incidence of low birth weight among infants and reduce the cost to the state from unnecessary hospitalizations of such infants by (1) maximizing coenrollment in the federal Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children and Medicaid for all eligible women; (2) encouraging tobacco cessation programs targeted to pregnant women; and (3) promoting the use of the centering pregnancy model of prenatal care. The department may recover the costs of implementing the provisions of this section through funds available from the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund established under section 4-28f of the general statutes and the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund.

Sec. 10. (*Effective from passage*) The Commission on Children, in consultation with the private sector, shall research the viability of enacting a state children and the recession fund that would provide

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funds and low-interest loans to families facing short-term crisis in housing, utilities, hunger and unemployment. Not later than January 1, 2011, the commission shall report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, its findings to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies.

Sec. 11. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) The Commission on Children shall coordinate information on youth leadership opportunities that keep youth engaged in the community. The commission shall inform the General Assembly and the public of such opportunities.

Sec. 12. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) No cause of action or liability shall arise against the state, any of its agencies or subdivisions, or any state official, employee or agent, for failure to comply with the provisions of sections 1 to 9, inclusive, of this act.

Sec. 13. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) The Department of Social Services shall submit a report on the policies and interventions promoted pursuant to sections 2 and 3 of this act, subsection (a) of section 4 of this act and sections 7 and 8 of this act. The report shall include key outcome indicators and measures and set benchmarks for evaluating progress in accomplishing the purposes of said sections. The department shall submit the report on or before January 1, 2011, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

(b) The Department of Education shall submit a report on the policies and interventions promoted pursuant to subsection (b) of section 4 and section 6 of this act. The report shall include key outcome indicators and measures and set benchmarks for evaluating progress in accomplishing the purposes of said sections. The department shall

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submit the report on or before January 1, 2011, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

(c) The Department of Public Health shall submit a report on the policies and interventions promoted pursuant to section 9 of this act. The report shall include key outcome indicators and measures and set benchmarks for evaluating progress in accomplishing the purposes of said section. The department shall submit the report on or before January 1, 2011, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

Approved June 8, 2010