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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

### **sSB 27**

#### ***AN ACT PROMOTING THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATION BY RECIPIENTS OF ASSISTANCE.***

#### **SUMMARY:**

To the extent permitted by federal law, this bill requires the commissioners of social services (DSS) and labor (DOL) to (1) permit recipients of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) to attend approved educational courses of study to meet their Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) employability plan requirements and (2) have such coursework count towards the first 20 hours of required employment-related activities (see BACKGROUND). Such courses of study can include two- or four-year college degree programs, high school equivalent programs, and basic education. The agencies must continue to ensure that the state meets the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) work participation rate requirement.

Under current law, the JFES program must permit and encourage parents receiving TFA to pursue education and training, including two- and four-year college degree programs, only when the state's unemployment rate reaches 8% or more and stays there for at least three months. In practice, DOL has permitted a limited number of TFA recipients to engage in high school-equivalent programs and basic education if they are embedded in a vocational rehabilitation activity. It generally prohibits individuals from pursuing a college degree unless such pursuit is in addition to, and not in lieu of, an allowable employment-related activity.

The bill requires the DOL commissioner, in consultation with the DSS commissioner, to implement policies and procedures to establish (1) which degree programs qualify and (2) enrollment and academic requirements for such students. It permits the DOL commissioner to implement policies and procedures while in the process of adopting

them in regulation, provided he prints notice of intent to adopt the regulations in the *Connecticut Law Journal* within 20 days of implementation. The policies and procedures are valid until final regulations go into effect.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Jobs First and the Federal Work Participation Rate***

The state's Jobs First program includes two parts—(1) TFA, which generally provides up to 21 months of cash assistance to needy families with children, and (2) JFES, which provides services and supports to adult caretakers to help them secure permanent employment within the time limit.

The federal TANF block grant funds the Jobs First program. Consequently, states that use TANF funds must follow federal rules regarding work. In general, 50% of a state's non-exempt, adult caretakers in families receiving TANF-funded cash assistance must be engaged in work-related activities for at least 30 hours a week (or 35 if a two-parent household). This is commonly referred to as the work participation rate.

Although the federal law requires the state to meet a 50% requirement, the state's effective rate is significantly lower because the TANF law also allows states to receive credit for reducing their cash assistance caseloads. Hence, in FFY 13, Connecticut has an effective work participation rate of 21.4%.

### ***Employability Plans and Allowable Work Activities***

State law requires DOL, in conjunction with the adult TFA recipient, to develop an employability plan to ensure that the adult is able to find work and support his or her family by the end of the 21-month time limit. (Extensions to this limit are allowed in certain circumstances.)

Federal law prescribes the types of activities that count towards the first 20 and the last 10 of the required 30 hours. Specifically, the law requires adults to engage in certain "core" activities during the first 20

hours. These are:

1. subsidized or unsubsidized employment;
2. paid work experience;
3. on-the-job training;
4. job search and job readiness;
5. vocational education training (up to 30% of the caseload may participate, with a 12-month maximum per participant);
6. community service; and
7. providing child care for others doing community service.

Federal law also allows states to permit teen parents who do not have their high school diplomas to attend high school or its equivalent during the first 20 hours. The JFES program allows this.

### ***Post-Secondary Education***

In general, post-secondary education is not an allowable JFES plan activity. But if a JFES participant has enrolled in post-secondary education on his or her own and is within six months of getting a degree, his or her JFES case manager must ensure that the employment plan activities do not interfere with the participant's completion of the degree program. In these cases, the number of hours the client participates in post-secondary education activities is counted as vocational education.

### **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 12 Nay 6 (04/03/2013)