
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 853

AN ACT CONCERNING TECHNICAL AND OTHER REVISIONS TO STATUTES CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES.

SUMMARY:

This bill makes changes to the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) reporting requirements. It also (1) eliminates a per person cap on the amount that DORS may spend to provide employment assistance to blind people; (2) increases dollar thresholds for wheelchair and certain equipment purchases; (3) expands Assistive Technology Revolving Fund loan eligibility; (4) authorizes the DORS commissioner to adopt regulations to implement its statutory purpose; and (5) makes several minor, technical, and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2013

§§ 2, 5, 7-10 — REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The bill requires the DORS commissioner to annually submit a report in electronic form to the governor and the Human Services and Appropriations committees on the department's activities related to services it provided (presumably during the prior year) to people who (1) are blind or visually impaired, (2) are deaf or hearing impaired, or (3) receive vocational rehabilitation services. The report must include the data the department provides to the federal government on evaluation standards and performance indicators for the vocational rehabilitation services program. It removes a requirement that DORS annually submit to the Human Services and Appropriations committees such data (CGS § 17b-665).

It eliminates requirements that the DORS commissioner annually submit to the governor and General Assembly a (1) report that includes recommendations for needed programs to assist deaf and

hearing impaired people and (2) statement of department activities related to services it provided to legally blind or visually impaired people in the state during the prior year.

§ 1 — EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR THE BLIND

Current law authorizes the DORS commissioner to help needy capable blind or partially blind people secure employment in industrial and mercantile establishments and in other paid positions. The bill instead conforms the law to practice by authorizing the DORS commissioner to help legally blind people secure employment. (Capable blind and partially blind are obsolete terms. The department currently provides such services to legally blind people regardless of their financial circumstances.)

The bill also eliminates a per-person expense cap of \$960 per fiscal year, but it retains language that allows the commissioner to provide such help expediently and within available appropriations.

§ 6 — PLACEMENT AND ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT AND WHEELCHAIRS

The bill increases the dollar thresholds up to which DORS, within available appropriations, may spend to purchase (1) wheelchairs and placement equipment (from \$3,500 to \$20,000 per unit); and (2) adaptive equipment (from \$10,000 to \$120,000 per unit). The bill removes DORS' authority to purchase modified vehicles costing up to \$25,000 for people with disabilities and instead allows the department to purchase the equipment to modify such vehicles for up to \$120,000 per unit. In practice, DORS only pays for necessary adaptations and modifications made to a vehicle; it does not purchase the actual vehicles.

§ 3 — ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY REVOLVING FUND

The bill conforms law to practice by authorizing the DORS commissioner, rather than the Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioner, to establish and administer the Assistive Technology Revolving Fund.

By law, the commissioner uses the fund to make loans to people with disabilities to purchase assistive equipment. The bill expands loan eligibility to include senior citizens or the family members of either group. It eliminates loan use for assistive equipment and instead allows the loans to be used for assistive technology and adaptive equipment and services. It also extends from five to 10 years the maximum loan term and caps the interest at a fixed rate of up to 6%. It removes obsolete language allowing the State Bond Commission to set the interest rate. (In practice, DORS sets the interest rate; the Bond Commission has not done so for years.)

The bill also requires the DORS commissioner to adopt regulations to implement these changes.

§ 4 — VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS

DORS offers vocational and training services to schools throughout Connecticut within available appropriations. Currently, it must place vocational rehabilitation counselors in the Bloomfield, Hartford, Norwich, West Hartford, and Wethersfield school districts and in any other district the department selects. The bill instead requires DORS to provide vocational rehabilitation counselors throughout the state.

BACKGROUND

DORS

PA 11- 4 created a new Bureau of Rehabilitative Services (renamed the Department of Rehabilitation Services, or DORS, in 2012). The act transferred functions of the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, the Board of Education and Services to the Blind, DSS' Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, and some additional disability-related programs to DORS.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 18 Nay 0 (03/12/2013)