
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 289 (File 243, as amended by Senate "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING OVERSIGHT AND FUNDING OF THE CONNECTICUT FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE.

SUMMARY

This bill repeals the John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative under current law and replaces it with the "Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative" or "CFI" with the same or similar purposes and objectives. It also establishes a (1) council to provide general oversight of the initiative, generally codifying existing practice, and (2) dedicated office within the Department of Social Services (DSS) for administrative support.

*Senate Amendment "A" limits the CFI council to 28 members, makes a technical correction to the title of an ex-officio member, and specifies that the DSS commissioner only fills vacancies for her appointed members.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

INITIATIVE ORGANIZATION AND OBJECTIVES

Whereas the current initiative was established within available appropriations under DSS, the bill creates the Office of the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative within DSS to be overseen by its commissioner. Although its funding is unspecified, this new office must perform administrative duties on CFI's behalf in accordance with a strategic plan developed and implemented by the initiative with the council's approval.

In comparison to the current initiative's emphasis on children eligible or formerly eligible for services funded by the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant (i.e., Temporary Family Assistance, the state's cash assistance program for low-income families), the new initiative broadens this emphasis to children from low-income families, regardless of their eligibility for TANF-funded

services. The bill also partially changes the new initiative's charge. Whereas the current initiative must identify certain services, including those that increase the ability of fathers to meet the financial and medical needs of their children through employment services and child support enforcement measures, the new initiative must instead identify services that increase fathers' abilities to meet their children's financial and emotional needs.

COUNCIL OVERSIGHT

The bill establishes a CFI Council to approve the initiative's work, including implementing objectives through a strategic plan the initiative develops. It requires the council to actively participate in efforts that further these objectives, including: (1) fostering collaboration between state agencies that provide services for fathers and families; (2) coordinating comprehensive services, ensuring their continuity, heightening their impact, and avoiding duplication; and (3) supporting fathers of children eligible, or formerly eligible, for TANF-funded services.

The council is composed of 28 members as outlined below in Table 1. The DSS Commissioner serves as a council chair, designates a co-chair from among the membership, and fills any vacancies within her appointments.

Table 1: CFI Council Membership

<i>Ex-Officio Members (or Designees)</i>	<i>DSS Commissioner Appointments</i>
Commissioners of: children and families, correction, developmental services, early childhood, education, housing, labor, mental health and addiction services, public health, social services, and veterans affairs	Five members, each with expertise in one of the following areas: (1) legal assistance to low-income populations, (2) family relations, (3) male mental and physical health, (4) domestic violence, and (5) child development
Board of Pardons and Parole Chairperson	One or more representatives of local fatherhood programs
Executive director of the Court Support Services Division and director of the Support Enforcement Services Division of the judicial branch	Three members, each representing the interests of one of the following stakeholders: (1) custodial parents, (2) noncustodial parents, and (3) children

<i>Ex-Officio Members (or Designees)</i>	<i>DSS Commissioner Appointments</i>
Chief family support magistrate	Governor's Workforce Council representative
President of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities	Regional workforce development board representative
Director of DSS's Office of Child Support Services	

The bill requires the DSS commissioner to convene the council within 30 days after its passage. They then must continue to meet at least quarterly. It also authorizes her to (1) designate a working group of council members to carry out specific required duties and (2) seek the advice and participation of any person, organization, or state or federal agency she deems necessary to carry out its provisions.

INITIATIVE FUNDING & REPORTING

Current law requires the DSS commissioner, within available resources, to apply for any available federal and private funds for programs that promote the initiative's objectives. Under the bill, she must consult with the council when doing so. It requires her to consult with the council when establishing grant eligibility and use the same minimum criteria and requirements as under current law to (1) award grants from any of these available funds and (2) condition their receipt.

Under current law, the commissioner must annually report to the Children and Human Services committees on the grant program's effectiveness in achieving initiative objectives. Starting by December 1, 2022, the bill requires her to annually do so in consultation with the council and to also report to the Appropriations Committee.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 20 Nay 0 (03/17/2022)