

§3788. Program requirements

1. Notice of program assistance. The department shall provide written notice to all applicants for and recipients of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program of the range of education, employment and training opportunities, and the types of support services, including transitional support services and medical assistance, available under the ASPIRE-TANF program, together with a statement that all participants may apply for those opportunities and services.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

1-A. Information about and application for Parents as Scholars Program. When there are fewer than 2,000 enrollees in the Parents as Scholars Program under chapter 1054-B, the department shall inform all persons applying for ASPIRE-TANF and all ASPIRE-TANF participants reviewing or requesting to amend their education, training or employment program under ASPIRE-TANF of the Parents as Scholars Program and shall offer them the opportunity to apply for the program. The department shall assist persons who apply for ASPIRE-TANF and participants seeking to matriculate for postsecondary education, including through appropriate referrals for remedial services or financial aid assistance, and shall assist persons with the provision of ASPIRE-TANF services for which they are eligible.

[PL 2021, c. 648, §8 (AMD).]

2. Application; decision. As part of the orientation process for ASPIRE-TANF, all participants must be given the opportunity to apply for any education, training and employment and support services at the office of the program serving the area in which the individual lives. At orientation, each participant shall receive a complete list of all support services and education, training and employment services available under the ASPIRE-TANF program so that the individual may identify the services that the individual considers necessary to participate in the program. A written copy of each amendment to the family contract must be given to the participant, together with a complete list of all support services and education, training and employment services available under the program and notice of the participant's right to request a conciliation meeting and a fair hearing. A participant may request an amendment to the participant's family contract at any time. If the participant's request is denied, the participant must be notified in writing of the reason for the denial and must be given notice of right to a fair hearing.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

3. Assessment. Each participant's case manager shall conduct an initial assessment to determine that individual's education, training and employment needs based on available program resources, the participant's skills and aptitudes, the participant's need for supportive services, local employment opportunities, the existence of any good cause circumstances under section 3785 and, to the maximum extent possible, the preferences of the participant. The department shall document findings in the participant's case record indicating any barriers to participation, including, but not limited to, any physical or mental health problems, including learning disabilities or cognitive impairments, or other good cause circumstances specified in section 3785.

[PL 2013, c. 376, §1 (AMD).]

3-A. Comprehensive screening and assessment. If upon an initial screening or at a later date it is determined that a participant has physical or mental health impairments, learning disabilities, cognitive impairments or limitations related to providing care for a household member with a disability or serious illness or a child with a serious behavioral condition, the participant must be offered the opportunity for a comprehensive assessment that may result in referral for alternative services, supports and income benefits. If the participant chooses to have a comprehensive assessment, the participant must be referred to a qualified professional to identify the strengths and needs of and barriers faced by that participant. The participant's case manager shall ensure that any accommodation or support services necessary for the participant to participate in the assessment are made available to the

participant. The participant may supplement this assessment with medical records or any other credible information related to the participant's ability to participate in program activities. An assessment under this subsection may also be initiated at the choice of the participant at any time. The individual performing this assessment shall recommend to the case manager any services, supports and programs needed to improve the economic self-sufficiency and well-being of the participant and the participant's family based on the assessment.

In coordination with the participant, the case manager shall establish a plan for the participant and the participant's family based on the assessment that includes appropriate services, supports and programs consistent with the findings and recommendations of the assessment that may include:

- A. Referral to a community agency qualified to assist the participant with services, supports, education, training and accommodations needed to reduce or overcome any barriers to achieving self-sufficiency and to fulfill the participant's personal and family responsibilities; and [PL 2013, c. 376, §2 (NEW).]
- B. Assistance needed by the participant to obtain federal social security disability insurance benefits or federal supplemental security income benefits. [PL 2013, c. 376, §2 (NEW).]

This subsection does not preclude a determination that the participant is temporarily unable to participate, including participation in any assessment pursuant to this subsection, due to good cause as described in section 3785. Any determination made under this subsection may be appealed in accordance with section 3762, subsection 9.

A participant who chooses to participate in a comprehensive assessment under this subsection and fails to participate without good cause may be sanctioned in accordance with section 3763, subsection 1-A, paragraph A regardless of any previous sanctions that the participant may have incurred.

The department shall provide training for case managers regarding their job responsibilities and their obligation to comply with the requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Maine Human Rights Act when interviewing and providing information to participants, when referring participants for alternative services or when considering whether the participant requires reasonable accommodations in order to participate in the ASPIRE-TANF program.

[PL 2013, c. 376, §2 (NEW).]

4. Employability plan.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (RP).]

4-A. Family contract amendment. To the extent that sufficient funds, training sites and employment opportunities are reasonably available, the department and a participant in the program shall enter into an amended family contract that must include both the department's and the participant's activities and the support services necessary for the individual to participate in accordance with the assessment, the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Public Law 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105 and the federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Public Law 109-171, 120 Stat. 4.

[PL 2009, c. 291, §8 (AMD).]

5. Provision of support services. Payment for support services must be furnished promptly in accordance with rules adopted by the department to, or on behalf of, eligible individuals as agreed to in the family contract. The rules must provide for an expedited procedure for payment for support services when those services are immediately necessary to enable the participant to participate in an approved education, training or employment plan.

The support services required to participate in ASPIRE-TANF must be specified in the family contract and each participant must receive the support services prescribed in that contract, which may include respite care.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

6. Education, training and employment services. The ASPIRE-TANF program must make available a broad range of education, training and employment services in accordance with section 3781-A, subsection 3 and the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Public Law 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105 and the federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Public Law 109-171, 120 Stat. 4. These services and activities must include all of those services and activities offered by the Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment Program on October 1, 1989, except in 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education and except as provided in chapter 1054-B. This section does not prohibit the department from purchasing equivalent services from providers other than those from whom those services were purchased on October 1, 1989. When a particular approved education or training service is available at comparable quality and cost, including the cost of support services, and the implementation of the family contract would not be unreasonably delayed, the program participant may choose to enroll for that service with the provider of that person's preference. If this decision is not mutually agreed to by the participant and the case manager, the decision must be reviewed by the case manager's supervisor. These services must include reimbursement for the cost of tuition, mandatory fees and the cost of transcripts or transferring credits for postsecondary education when the participant has exhausted any available educational funding to complete the participant's family contract, in accordance with department rules.

- A. [PL 2021, c. 648, §9 (RP).]
- B. [PL 2021, c. 648, §9 (RP).]
- C. [PL 2021, c. 648, §9 (RP).]

When a substantially similar postsecondary education or training program of comparable quality is available at both a public and private institution, within a reasonable commuting distance for the participant, the department may choose to approve the program offered at the public institution if the participant's program can be completed at less cost at the institution.

[PL 2021, c. 648, §9 (AMD).]

6-A. Parents as Scholars Program prematriculation services. The department shall assist ASPIRE-TANF participants interested in applying for the Parents as Scholars Program under chapter 1054-B to prepare to matriculate, including enrolling participants or preparing participants for enrollment in a program providing remedial services necessary for matriculation; identifying the strengths, needs and barriers faced by participants; and making referrals to programs qualified to assist participants with the services, supports, education, training and accommodations needed to reduce or overcome barriers to enrollment in the Parents as Scholars Program. The department shall cover the cost of support services in accordance with this section needed for any activity under this subsection included in the family contract. Any hours spent preparing for matriculation under this subsection, including, but not limited to, exploring educational opportunities and financial aid options and applying for educational programs or financial aid, must be considered hours of participation in ASPIRE-TANF for the purposes of participation under chapter 1053-B. These hours may also be counted for federal participation as allowable by federal law.

[PL 2021, c. 648, §10 (NEW).]

7. Readability.

[PL 1995, c. 418, Pt. A, §32 (RP).]

7-A. Basic skills education. The department shall make available to individuals participating in the ASPIRE-TANF program basic skills education, including programs that assist individuals in obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent or comparable credential. The time spent by an ASPIRE-TANF participant in basic skills education must be counted toward the first 20 hours of the participant's required weekly work participation, except that this subsection is suspended for any period for which it would cause the State to fail to meet the work participation rate requirements pursuant to

42 United States Code, Section 607, subsection (a). The department shall ensure that the State's work verification plan required under federal law for validating work participation activities of ASPIRE-TANF participants includes basic skills education in the definition of vocational educational training when it is a necessary part of a participant's vocational educational training plan.

[PL 2019, c. 484, §5 (NEW).]

8. Annual report.

[PL 1995, c. 418, Pt. A, §32 (RP).]

9. Rules. The department shall adopt rules in accordance with the Maine Administrative Procedure Act to implement this section.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

10. Program design. The department shall operate the ASPIRE-TANF program in accordance with the requirements of the federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Public Law 109-171, 120 Stat. 4.

A. Individuals who are ready for jobs may participate in job search at any time. Up-front job search must focus on new recipients who are ready for jobs who are eligible for TANF based on underemployment of the primary wage earner and new single-parent recipients who are ready for jobs and whose children are 5 years of age or older. [PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

B. Work evaluation consists of all activities related to orientation, assessment and initial family contract formulation. Work evaluation is limited to a maximum of 90 days, unless extended by the commissioner or the designee of the commissioner. If an ASPIRE-TANF participant is determined by the department to be job ready, the participant may access the workforce-MaineServe component directly from work evaluation. [PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

C. Except for participants who are accepted into the Parents as Scholars Program established under section 3790, education, training and treatment is limited to a maximum of 24 months, starting with the first day of participation in any allowable and approved job skills or occupational skills training activity. The 24-month period may be extended by the commissioner or the designee of the commissioner for good cause shown.

The department may approve a job skills or occupational training activity longer than 24 months provided the participant agrees to perform a minimum of 20 hours a week of work site experience by no later than the end of the 24-month period. Qualifying work site experience may include, but is not limited to, paid employment, workforce-MaineServe, ASPIRE-Plus, work study, training-related practicums or any other such work site approved by the department. The 24-month period does not include periods of nonactivity in which good cause has been determined.

For individuals who are satisfactorily participating in an education or training program prior to the work evaluation, the department must determine the acceptability of the activity for purposes of meeting the participation requirements of this chapter using the same criteria as is used for any individual in the ASPIRE-TANF program. [PL 2005, c. 480, §1 (AMD).]

D. Workforce-MaineServe consists of paid employment, subsidized employment, apprenticeships or other mandatory work activities, which may continue until the participant is ineligible for TANF benefits. [PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

[PL 2009, c. 291, §10 (AMD).]

11. Individual participation requirements. Participation in the program components is governed by subsection 10 and this subsection.

A. For recipients whose eligibility for TANF is based on unemployment or underemployment of the primary wage earner, participation in the workforce-MaineServe component is required and any participation in the education, training and treatment component is contingent on satisfactory participation in workforce-MaineServe. [PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

B. ASPIRE-TANF participants who are attending school or are involved in an equivalent educational program recognized by the Department of Education or a local school board are considered to be in the education, training or treatment component and their participation is not limited to 24 months. The department shall encourage recipients younger than 20 years of age who have not completed high school to attend traditional high school. [PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

C. Subject to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, if a recipient of TANF is hindered from obtaining employment or successfully completing any portion of the ASPIRE-TANF program by reason of substance use, the recipient must enter into a substance use disorder treatment program. This treatment activity may occur at any time during the ASPIRE-TANF program. [PL 2017, c. 407, Pt. A, §81 (AMD).]

D. If a claim of disability or other good cause is made by a participant, the department shall assess the circumstances of the claim. If good cause is found to exist, the department shall offer reasonable alternative participation requirements and document them in the participant's family contract and case record. [PL 2001, c. 335, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2017, c. 407, Pt. A, §81 (AMD).]

12. Developing resources. To assist the department in its efforts to encourage job placement opportunities and provide the services necessary to ensure self-support to recipients of TANF assistance, the department may contract with public and private agencies to establish job placement opportunities.

In order to assist in the development of job placement opportunities, the department in cooperation with the Department of Labor and other state agencies shall explore the feasibility of developing a shared approach to technology to support access to information talent banks, national job banks, Maine's job listings and any other job opportunity listings, to facilitate linking program resources listings and to coordinate case service providers.

In addition, all public and private agencies are subject to the following requirements.

A. All agencies that receive funds from any state department or division must provide at least one workforce-MaineServe opportunity for an ASPIRE-TANF participant. [PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

B. All state agencies that provide funding for child care or transportation services must require that recipients of TANF be given priority for those services. [PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (AMD).]

C. All agencies that receive funds from any state agency for the treatment of substance use disorder must require that recipients of TANF be given priority for those services. [PL 2017, c. 407, Pt. A, §82 (AMD).]

[PL 2017, c. 407, Pt. A, §82 (AMD).]

13. Determination of types of opportunities.

[PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26 (RP).]

14. Family planning services.

[PL 2005, c. 480, §3 (RP).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1989, c. 501, §Y5 (NEW). PL 1989, c. 839, §§10,11 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 528, §§F13,14 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 528, §RRR (AFF). PL 1991, c. 591, §§F13,14 (AMD). PL 1993, c. 385, §21 (AMD). PL 1995, c. 418, §§A29-33 (AMD). PL 1997, c. 530, §A26 (AMD). PL 2001, c. 335, §§2,3 (AMD). PL 2005, c. 480, §§1-3 (AMD). PL 2009, c. 291, §§8-10 (AMD). PL 2013,

c. 376, §§1, 2 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 407, Pt. A, §§81, 82 (AMD). PL 2019, c. 484, §5 (AMD). PL 2021, c. 648, §§8-10 (AMD).

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