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State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

EIGHTY-SIXTH SESSION

HOUSE FILE NO. 580

February 5, 2009
Authored by Hosch and Hayden
The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Health Care and Human Services Policy and Oversight

A bill for an act

relating to human services; modifying MFIP family stabilization and work programs; amending Minnesota Statutes 2008, sections 256J.425, subdivision 4; 256J.46, subdivision 1; 256J.53, subdivision 1; 256J.57, subdivision 1; 256J.575, subdivisions 3, 6, 7.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2008, section 256J.425, subdivision 4, is amended to read:

Subd. 4. **Employed participants.** (a) An assistance unit subject to the time limit under section 256J.42, subdivision 1, is eligible to receive assistance under a hardship extension if the participant who reached the time limit belongs to:

(1) a one-parent assistance unit in which the participant is participating in work activities for at least 30 hours per week, of which an average of at least 25 hours per week every month are spent participating in employment;

(2) a two-parent assistance unit in which the participants are participating in work activities for at least 55 hours per week, of which an average of at least 45 hours per week every month are spent participating in employment; or

(3) an assistance unit in which a participant is participating in employment for fewer hours than those specified in clause (1), and the participant submits verification from a qualified professional, in a form acceptable to the commissioner, stating that the number of hours the participant may work is limited due to illness or disability, as long as the participant is participating in employment for at least the number of hours specified by the qualified professional. The participant must be following the treatment recommendations of the qualified professional providing the verification. The commissioner shall develop a form to be completed and signed by the qualified professional, documenting the diagnosis

and any additional information necessary to document the functional limitations of the participant that limit work hours. If the participant is part of a two-parent assistance unit, the other parent must be treated as a one-parent assistance unit for purposes of meeting the work requirements under this subdivision.

(b) For purposes of this section, employment means:

(1) unsubsidized employment under section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (1);

(2) subsidized employment under section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (2);

(3) on-the-job training under section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (2);

(4) an apprenticeship under section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (1);

(5) supported work under section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (2);

(6) a combination of clauses (1) to (5); ~~or~~

(7) child care under section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (7), if it is in combination with paid employment; or

(8) unpaid work under section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (3), if it is combined with job search for up to 12 months in duration.

(c) If a participant is complying with a child protection plan under chapter 260C, the number of hours required under the child protection plan count toward the number of hours required under this subdivision.

(d) The county shall provide the opportunity for subsidized employment to participants needing that type of employment within available appropriations.

(e) To be eligible for a hardship extension for employed participants under this subdivision, a participant must be in compliance for at least ten out of the 12 months the participant received MFIP immediately preceding the participant's 61st month on assistance. If ten or fewer months of eligibility for TANF assistance remain at the time the participant from another state applies for assistance, the participant must be in compliance every month.

(f) The employment plan developed under section 256J.521, subdivision 2, for participants under this subdivision must contain at least the minimum number of hours specified in paragraph (a) for the purpose of meeting the requirements for an extension under this subdivision. The job counselor and the participant must sign the employment plan to indicate agreement between the job counselor and the participant on the contents of the plan.

(g) Participants who fail to meet the requirements in paragraph (a), without good cause under section 256J.57, shall be sanctioned or permanently disqualified under subdivision 6. Good cause may only be granted for that portion of the month for which

the good cause reason applies. Participants must meet all remaining requirements in the approved employment plan or be subject to sanction or permanent disqualification.

(h) If the noncompliance with an employment plan is due to the involuntary loss of employment, the participant is exempt from the hourly employment requirement under this subdivision for one month. Participants must meet all remaining requirements in the approved employment plan or be subject to sanction or permanent disqualification. This exemption is available to each participant two times in a 12-month period.

Sec. 2. Minnesota Statutes 2008, section 256J.46, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

Subdivision 1. **Participants not complying with program requirements.** (a) A participant who fails without good cause under section 256J.57 to comply with the requirements of this chapter, and who is not subject to a sanction under subdivision 2, shall be subject to a sanction as provided in this subdivision. Prior to the imposition of a sanction, a county agency shall provide a notice of intent to sanction under section 256J.57, subdivision 2, and, when applicable, a notice of adverse action as provided in section 256J.31.

(b) A sanction under this subdivision becomes effective the month following the month in which a required notice is given. A sanction must not be imposed when a participant comes into compliance with the requirements for orientation under section 256J.45 prior to the effective date of the sanction. A sanction must not be imposed when a participant comes into compliance with the requirements for employment and training services under sections 256J.515 to 256J.57 ten days prior to the effective date of the sanction. For purposes of this subdivision, each month that a participant fails to comply with a requirement of this chapter shall be considered a separate occurrence of noncompliance. If both participants in a two-parent assistance unit are out of compliance at the same time, it is considered one occurrence of noncompliance.

(c) Sanctions for noncompliance shall be imposed as follows:

(1) For the first occurrence of noncompliance by a participant in an assistance unit, the assistance unit's grant shall be reduced by ten percent of the MFIP standard of need for an assistance unit of the same size with the residual grant paid to the participant. The reduction in the grant amount must be in effect for a minimum of one month and shall be removed in the month following the month that the participant returns to compliance.

(2) For a second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth occurrence of noncompliance by a participant in an assistance unit, the assistance unit's shelter costs shall be vendor paid up to the amount of the cash portion of the MFIP grant for which the assistance unit is eligible. At county option, the assistance unit's utilities may also be vendor paid up to

the amount of the cash portion of the MFIP grant remaining after vendor payment of the assistance unit's shelter costs. The residual amount of the grant after vendor payment, if any, must be reduced by an amount equal to 30 percent of the MFIP standard of need for an assistance unit of the same size before the residual grant is paid to the assistance unit. The reduction in the grant amount must be in effect for a minimum of one month and shall be removed in the month following the month that the participant in a one-parent assistance unit returns to compliance. In a two-parent assistance unit, the grant reduction must be in effect for a minimum of one month and shall be removed in the month following the month both participants return to compliance. The vendor payment of shelter costs and, if applicable, utilities shall be removed six months after the month in which the participant or participants return to compliance. If an assistance unit is sanctioned under this clause, the participant's case file must be reviewed to determine if the employment plan is still appropriate.

(d) For a seventh occurrence of noncompliance by a participant in an assistance unit, or when the participants in a two-parent assistance unit have a total of seven occurrences of noncompliance, the county agency shall close the MFIP assistance unit's financial assistance case, both the cash and food portions, and redetermine the family's continued eligibility for food support payments. The MFIP case must remain closed for a minimum of one full month. Before the case is closed, the county agency or employment services provider must assess the participant and determine if information is available that the participant may be eligible for family stabilization services based on the criteria in section 256J.575, subdivision 3. The county agency must also review the participant's case to determine if the employment plan is still appropriate and attempt to meet with the participant face-to-face. The participant may bring an advocate to the face-to-face meeting. If a face-to-face meeting is not conducted, the county agency must send the participant a written notice that includes the information required under clause (1).

(1) During the face-to-face meeting, the county agency must:

(i) determine whether the continued noncompliance can be explained and mitigated by providing a needed preemployment activity, as defined in section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (9);

(ii) determine whether the participant qualifies for a good cause exception under section 256J.57, or if the sanction is for noncooperation with child support requirements, determine if the participant qualifies for a good cause exemption under section 256.741, subdivision 10;

(iii) determine whether the work activities in the employment plan are appropriate based on the criteria in section 256J.521, subdivision 2 or 3;

(iv) determine whether the participant qualifies for the family violence waiver;

(v) inform the participant of the participant's sanction status and explain the consequences of continuing noncompliance;

(vi) identify other resources that may be available to the participant to meet the needs of the family; and

(vii) inform the participant of the right to appeal under section 256J.40.

(2) If the lack of an identified activity or service can explain the noncompliance, the county must work with the participant to provide the identified activity.

(3) The grant must be restored to the full amount for which the assistance unit is eligible retroactively to the first day of the month in which the participant was found to lack preemployment activities or to qualify for a family violence waiver, family stabilization services, or for a good cause exemption under section 256.741, subdivision 10, or 256J.57.

(e) For the purpose of applying sanctions under this section, only occurrences of noncompliance that occur after July 1, 2003, shall be considered. If the participant is in 30 percent sanction in the month this section takes effect, that month counts as the first occurrence for purposes of applying the sanctions under this section, but the sanction shall remain at 30 percent for that month.

(f) An assistance unit whose case is closed under paragraph (d) or (g), may reapply for MFIP and shall be eligible if the participant complies with MFIP program requirements and demonstrates compliance for up to one month. No assistance shall be paid during this period.

(g) An assistance unit whose case has been closed for noncompliance, that reapplies under paragraph (f), is subject to sanction under paragraph (c), clause (2), for a first occurrence of noncompliance. Any subsequent occurrence of noncompliance shall result in case closure under paragraph (d).

Sec. 3. Minnesota Statutes 2008, section 256J.53, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

Subdivision 1. **Length of program.** ~~In order for~~ A postsecondary education or training program ~~to be an~~ approved as a work activity as defined in section 256J.49, subdivision 13, clause (6), ~~it must be a program lasting 24 months or less~~ may include associate and baccalaureate programs, and the participant must meet the requirements of subdivisions 2, 3, and 5.

Sec. 4. Minnesota Statutes 2008, section 256J.57, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

Subdivision 1. **Good cause for failure to comply.** The county agency shall not impose the sanction under section 256J.46 if it determines that the participant has good

cause for failing to comply with the requirements of sections 256J.515 to 256J.57. Good cause exists when:

(1) appropriate child care is not available;

(2) the job does not meet the definition of suitable employment;

(3) the participant is ill or injured;

(4) a member of the assistance unit, a relative in the household, or a foster child in the household is ill and needs care by the participant that prevents the participant from complying with the employment plan;

(5) the participant is unable to secure necessary transportation;

(6) the participant is in an emergency situation that prevents compliance with the employment plan;

(7) the schedule of compliance with the employment plan conflicts with judicial proceedings;

(8) a mandatory MFIP meeting is scheduled during a time that conflicts with a judicial proceeding or a meeting related to a juvenile court matter, or a participant's work schedule;

(9) the participant is already participating in acceptable work activities;

(10) the employment plan requires an educational program for a caregiver under age 20, but the educational program is not available;

(11) activities identified in the employment plan are not available;

(12) the participant is willing to accept suitable employment, but suitable employment is not available; ~~or~~

(13) the participant documents other verifiable impediments to compliance with the employment plan beyond the participant's control; or

(14) the documentation needed to determine if a participant is eligible for family stabilization services is not available, but there is information that the participant may qualify and the participant is cooperating with the county or employment service provider's efforts to obtain the documentation necessary to determine eligibility.

The job counselor shall work with the participant to reschedule mandatory meetings for individuals who fall under clauses (1), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), and (8).

Sec. 5. Minnesota Statutes 2008, section 256J.575, subdivision 3, is amended to read:

Subd. 3. **Eligibility.** (a) The following MFIP or diversionary work program (DWP) participants are eligible for the services under this section:

(1) a participant who meets the requirements for or has been granted a hardship extension under section 256J.425, subdivision 2 or 3, except that it is not necessary for

the participant to have reached or be approaching 60 months of eligibility for this section to apply;

(2) a participant who is applying for Supplemental Security Income or Social Security disability insurance; and

(3) a participant who is a noncitizen who has been in the United States for 12 or fewer months.

(b) Families must meet all other eligibility requirements for MFIP established in this chapter. Families are eligible for financial assistance to the same extent as if they were participating in MFIP.

(c) A participant under paragraph (a), clause (3), must be provided with English as a second language opportunities and skills training for up to 12 months. After 12 months, the case manager and participant must determine whether the participant should continue with English as a second language classes or skills training, or both, and continue to receive family stabilization services.

(d) If a county agency or employment services provider has information that an MFIP participant may meet the eligibility criteria set forth in this subdivision, the county agency or employment services provider must assist the participant in obtaining the documentation necessary to determine eligibility. Until necessary documentation is obtained, the participant must be treated as an eligible participant under subdivisions 5 to 7.

Sec. 6. Minnesota Statutes 2008, section 256J.575, subdivision 6, is amended to read:

Subd. 6. **Cooperation with services requirements.** (a) ~~To be eligible,~~ A participant who is eligible for family stabilization services under this section shall comply with paragraphs (b) to (d).

(b) Participants shall engage in family stabilization plan services for the appropriate number of hours per week that the activities are scheduled and available, unless good cause exists for not doing so, as defined in section 256J.57, subdivision 1. The appropriate number of hours must be based on the participant's plan.

(c) The case manager shall review the participant's progress toward the goals in the family stabilization plan every six months to determine whether conditions have changed, including whether revisions to the plan are needed.

(d) A participant's requirement to comply with any or all family stabilization plan requirements under this subdivision is excused when the case management services, training and educational services, or family support services identified in the participant's family stabilization plan are unavailable for reasons beyond the control of the participant, including when money appropriated is not sufficient to provide the services.

Sec. 7. Minnesota Statutes 2008, section 256J.575, subdivision 7, is amended to read:

Subd. 7. **Sanctions.** (a) The county agency or employment services provider must follow the requirements of this subdivision at the time the county agency or employment services provider has information that an MFIP recipient may meet the eligibility criteria in subdivision 3.

(b) The financial assistance grant of a participating family is reduced according to section 256J.46, if a participating adult fails without good cause to comply or continue to comply with the family stabilization plan requirements in this subdivision, unless compliance has been excused under subdivision 6, paragraph (d).

~~(b)~~ (c) Given the purpose of the family stabilization services in this section and the nature of the underlying family circumstances that act as barriers to both employment and full compliance with program requirements, there must be a review by the county agency prior to imposing a sanction to determine whether the plan was appropriated to the needs of the participant and family~~, and~~. There must be a current assessment by a behavioral health or medical professional confirming that the participant in all ways had the ability to comply with the plan~~, as confirmed by a behavioral health or medical professional~~.

~~(c)~~ (d) Prior to the imposition of a sanction, the county agency or employment services provider shall review the participant's case to determine if the family stabilization plan is still appropriate and meet with the participant face-to-face. ~~The participant may bring an advocate~~ The county agency or employment services provider must inform the participant of the right to bring an advocate to the face-to-face meeting.

During the face-to-face meeting, the county agency shall:

(1) determine whether the continued noncompliance can be explained and mitigated by providing a needed family stabilization service, as defined in subdivision 2, paragraph (d);

(2) determine whether the participant qualifies for a good cause exception under section 256J.57, or if the sanction is for noncooperation with child support requirements, determine if the participant qualifies for a good cause exemption under section 256.741, subdivision 10;

(3) determine whether activities in the family stabilization plan are appropriate based on the family's circumstances;

(4) explain the consequences of continuing noncompliance;

(5) identify other resources that may be available to the participant to meet the needs of the family; and

(6) inform the participant of the right to appeal under section 256J.40.

If the lack of an identified activity or service can explain the noncompliance, the county shall work with the participant to provide the identified activity.

(d) If the participant fails to come to the face-to-face meeting, the case manager or a designee shall attempt at least one home visit. If a face-to-face meeting is not conducted, the county agency shall send the participant a written notice that includes the information under paragraph (c).

(e) After the requirements of paragraphs (c) and (d) are met and prior to imposition of a sanction, the county agency shall provide a notice of intent to sanction under section 256J.57, subdivision 2, and, when applicable, a notice of adverse action under section 256J.31.

(f) Section 256J.57 applies to this section except to the extent that it is modified by this subdivision.