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## **An Act To Reduce the Liability of Maine Taxpayers by Aligning Maine's Welfare Programs with Federal Law**

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

**Sec. 1. 22 MRSA §3762, sub-§4**, as enacted by PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §16, is amended to read:

**4. Promoting support by both parents.** The department shall enforce laws and establish policies to ensure that both parents contribute to the economic support of their child or children and to promote every child's right to economic support from both parents. Applicants for and recipients of assistance may refuse to cooperate in the establishment of paternity or child support enforcement for good cause related to domestic violence, including situations when cooperation may result in harm to the parent or child, or when the child was conceived as a result of incest or rape. Evidence supporting a good cause determination includes, but is not limited to, the evidence specified in section ~~3785~~3785-B, ~~subsection 13~~subsections 1 and 2. The department shall notify all applicants and recipients orally and in writing of the availability of this determination. When a determination of good cause is made by the department, the department may not impose sanctions or penalties against the applicant or recipient or engage in any other activity that could subject any member of the family to harm.

**Sec. 2. 22 MRSA §3762, sub-§10, ¶¶A and B**, as enacted by PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §16, are amended to read:

A. The department shall provide all applicants for assistance under this chapter with information both orally and in writing of the availability of services for victims of domestic violence and of the good cause determination for victims of domestic violence under section ~~3785~~, ~~subsection 13~~3785-B. If an applicant requests a good cause determination under section ~~3785~~, ~~subsection 13~~3785-B, the department shall promptly determine whether the applicant qualifies for good cause. An individual may not be required to participate in any TANF activity including orientation until the good cause determination is made.

B. When a determination of good cause is made under section ~~3785~~, ~~subsection 13~~3785-B, the ASPIRE-TANF program may contact the individual and offer domestic violence victim services or other appropriate services on a voluntary basis.

**Sec. 3. 22 MRSA §3763, sub-§1-A**, as enacted by PL 2011, c. 380, Pt. PP, §4, is amended to read:

**1-A. Partial and full termination of benefits.** Benefits under this chapter must be terminated by the department under the provisions of subsection 1 and sections ~~3785~~ and ~~3785-A~~ and 3785-B as follows:

A. For a first failure to meet the conditions of a family contract, termination of benefits applies to the adult recipient;

B. For a first failure to meet the conditions of a family contract for which termination of benefits under paragraph A lasts for longer than 90 days and for a 2nd and subsequent violation, termination of benefits applies to the adult recipient and the full family unit; and

C. Prior to the implementation of a full family unit sanction, the department shall offer the adult recipient an opportunity to claim good cause for noncompliance as described in section ~~3785~~3785-B.

Benefits that have been terminated under this subsection must be restored once the adult recipient signs a new contract under subsection 1 and complies with the provisions of the family contract.

**Sec. 4. 22 MRSA §3785**, as amended by PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §§20 to 24, is repealed.

**Sec. 5. 22 MRSA §3785-A, first ¶**, as enacted by PL 2001, c. 335, §1, is amended to read:

~~Prior to imposing a sanction against an individual, the department must complete the~~The sanction process, which includes the following.

**Sec. 6. 22 MRSA §3785-A, sub-§1**, as enacted by PL 2001, c. 335, §1, is amended to read:

**1. Procedures.** Prior to imposing a sanction against an individual for failure to comply with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or ASPIRE-TANF rules, the department shall:

A. Thoroughly review the circumstances of the individual; and

~~B. Provide the individual with a notice that states the basis for the sanction and a complete list of good cause reasons as set forth in section 3785;~~

~~C. Provide the individual with an opportunity to inform the department of good cause circumstances under section 3785; and~~

D. Obtain supervisory approval of the recommendation of the case manager to impose a sanction.

**Sec. 7. 22 MRSA §3785-A, sub-§1-A** is enacted to read:

**1-A. Notice of basis for sanction.** At the time of imposing a sanction against an individual for failure to comply with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or ASPIRE-TANF rules, the department shall provide the individual with a notice that states the basis for the sanction and the good cause reason as set forth in section 3785-B.

**Sec. 8. 22 MRSA §3785-B** is enacted to read:

**§ 3785-B. Domestic violence exception from sanctions for failure to participate**

An individual may not be sanctioned under this program or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families for failure to participate in the ASPIRE-TANF program if that individual is unable to participate because of physical injuries or the psychological effects of abuse; because of legal proceedings, counseling or other activities related to abuse; because the abuser actively interferes with the individual's participation; because the location puts the individual at risk; or for other good cause related to domestic

violence. Good cause for failure to participate in this program must be found when there is reasonable and verifiable evidence of domestic violence. For the purposes of this subsection, reasonable and verifiable evidence may include but is not limited to the following:

**1. Records.** Court, medical, law enforcement, child protective, social services, psychological or other records that establish that the individual has been a victim of domestic violence; or

**2. Sworn statements.** Sworn statements from persons other than the individual with knowledge of the circumstances affecting the individual.

Each individual participating in an ASPIRE-TANF orientation must receive written and oral notice of what constitutes good cause for nonparticipation in ASPIRE-TANF.

**Sec. 9. 22 MRSA §3787-A** is enacted to read:

**§ 3787-A. Fund for the Payment of Federal Fines Imposed for Noncompliance with Federal Work Participation Requirements**

**1. Fund established.** The Fund for the Payment of Federal Fines Imposed for Noncompliance with Federal Work Participation Requirements, referred to in this section as "the fund," is established within the department for the purpose of paying fines imposed on the State by the Federal Government due to the State's failure to comply with federal requirements related to the ASPIRE-TANF program.

**2. Fund maintenance.** By January 31st annually, the commissioner shall report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters any fines owed by the State to the Federal Government as a result of noncompliance with federal work participation requirements under the ASPIRE-TANF program. The committee, within 30 days of the commissioner's report, shall report out a bill that appropriates to the fund the amount necessary to pay any federal fines owed and may report out legislation related to the commissioner's report.

**Sec. 10. 22 MRSA §3788, sub-§3,** as amended by PL 2013, c. 376, §1, is further amended to read:

**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~~**3785-B** 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~~**3785-B**.

**Sec. 11. 22 MRSA §3788, sub-§3-A,** as enacted by PL 2013, c. 376, §2, is amended to read:

**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
- B. Assistance needed by the participant to obtain federal social security disability insurance benefits or federal supplemental security income benefits.

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~~3785-B. 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.

**Sec. 12. 22 MRSA §3788, sub-§10, ¶C**, as amended by PL 2005, c. 480, §1, is repealed and the following enacted in its place:

C. For individuals who are satisfactorily participating in an education or training program, the department shall determine the acceptability of the activity for purposes of meeting the participation requirements of this chapter using the same criteria as are used for any individual in the ASPIRE-TANF program.

**Sec. 13. 22 MRSA §3788, sub-§11, ¶B**, as amended by PL 1997, c. 530, Pt. A, §26, is further amended to read:

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.

**Sec. 14. 22 MRSA §3788, sub-§11, ¶D**, as enacted by PL 2001, c. 335, §3, is amended to read:

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 disability or other good cause is found to exist, the department shall offer reasonable alternative participation requirements to the extent required by federal law and document them in the participant's family contract and case record.

**Sec. 15. 22 MRSA §3790, sub-§3**, as repealed and replaced by PL 1999, c. 407, §1, is amended to read:

**3. Program requirements.** An enrollee must participate in a combination of education, training, study or work-site experience ~~for an average of 20 hours per week in a manner that meets federal work participation requirements~~ in the first ~~24~~12 months of the program. Aid under this chapter may continue beyond ~~24~~12 months if the enrollee remains in an educational program and ~~agrees to participate in either of the following options:~~meets federal work participation requirements.

A. ~~Fifteen hours per week of work-site experience in addition to other education, training or study; or~~

B. ~~A total of 40 hours of education, training, study or work-site experience.~~

~~The department shall present both options to enrollees and permit them to choose either option. For the purpose of this subsection, work-site experience includes, but is not limited to, paid employment, work study, practicums, internships, clinical placements, laboratory or field work directly related to the enrollee's employment goal or any other work activities that, as determined by the department, will enhance the enrollee's employability in the enrollee's field. In the last semester of the enrollee's educational program, work-site experience may also include resume preparation, employment research, interviews and other activities related to job placement.~~

~~The department shall make reasonable adjustments in the participation requirements in this subsection for good cause. For the purpose of this subsection, "good cause" means circumstances in which the required participation would cause the enrollee to seriously compromise academic performance. "Good cause" includes, but is not limited to, a verifiable need to take care of a family member with special needs, a physical or mental health problem, illness, accident, death or a serious personal or family problem that necessitates reduced participation or time off from education, training or work. An enrollee receiving aid under this chapter must make satisfactory progress in the enrollee's educational program. The department shall adopt rules defining satisfactory academic progress. The department may not disapprove an educational plan based solely on the length of the educational program.~~

**Sec. 16. Appropriations and allocations.** The following appropriations and allocations are made.

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF (FORMERLY DHS)**

**Fund for the Payment of Federal Fines Imposed for Noncompliance with Federal Work Participation Requirements N224**

Initiative: Provides funding to pay fines imposed on the State by the Federal Government due to the State's failure to comply with federal requirements related to the ASPIRE-TANF program.

<b>GENERAL FUND</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
All Other	\$0	\$1,016,590
<b>GENERAL FUND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$1,016,590</b>

**SUMMARY**

This bill makes the following changes to the laws governing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, program.

1. It removes all the good cause exceptions that prevent a person from being sanctioned under the Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or ASPIRE-TANF, program or the TANF program for failure to participate in the ASPIRE-TANF program, with the exception of domestic violence.

2. It removes the 24-month limit on education training and treatment for participants in the ASPIRE-TANF program in order to eliminate the difference between Maine and federal law regarding the number of months of education and training that may qualify as countable work activities and specifies that accommodations for an individual with a disability are limited to those required by federal law.

The bill amends the Parents as Scholars Program to specify that an enrollee in the program must meet federal work participation requirements.

The bill establishes the Fund for the Payment of Federal Fines Imposed for Noncompliance with Federal Work Participation Requirements in the Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose

of the fund is to pay fines imposed on the State by the Federal Government due to the State's failure to comply with federal requirements related to the ASPIRE-TANF program. The bill provides an appropriation in fiscal year 2016-17 and requires the Commissioner of Health and Human Services to report annually regarding the fines owed by the State for noncompliance to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters, which is required to report out a bill, within 30 days of the commissioner's report, appropriating the amount necessary to pay the fines.