

AN ACT

RELATING TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE; PROVIDING EXPEDITED CHILD CARE; AMENDING THE NEW MEXICO WORKS ACT.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

Section 1. Section 27-2B-4 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1998, Chapter 8, Section 4 and also Laws 1998, Chapter 9, Section 4 as amended by Laws 1999, Chapter 71, Section 1 and also by Laws 1999, Chapter 273, Section 2 and also by Laws 1999, Chapter 280, Section 1) is amended to read:

"27-2B-4. APPLICATION--RESOURCE PLANNING SESSION--INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY PLANS--PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT--REVIEW PERIODS.--

A. Application for cash assistance or services shall be made to the department's county office in the county or district in which an applicant resides. The application shall be in writing or reduced to writing in the manner and on the form prescribed by the department. The application shall be made under oath by an applicant having custody of or residing with a dependent child who is a household group member and shall contain a statement of the age of the child, residence, a complete statement of the amount of property in which the applicant has an interest, a statement of all income that he and other household group members have at the time of the filing of the application and other information required by the department.

B. Application for expedited food stamps shall be made to the department's county office in the county or

district in which an applicant resides. The department shall process the application for expedited food stamps within twenty-four hours after the application is made.

C. At the time of application for cash assistance and services, an applicant shall identify household group members who are to be counted in the benefit group. Once an application is approved, the participant shall advise the department if there are any changes in the membership of the household group or benefit group. A household group may contain more than one benefit group.

D. No later than forty-five days after an application is filed, the department shall provide to an applicant a resource planning session to ascertain his immediate needs, assess financial and nonfinancial options, make referrals and act on the application.

E. Immediately after an application is approved, the children, youth and families department shall provide child-care services to the participant.

F. Whenever the department receives an application for assistance, a verification and record of the applicant's circumstances shall promptly be made to ascertain the facts supporting the application and to obtain other information required by the department. The verification may include a visit to the home of the applicant, as long as the department gives adequate prior notice of the visit to the applicant.

G. Within fifteen days after an application is approved, the department shall assess the education, skills,

prior work experience and employability of the participant.

H. After the initial assessment of skills, the department shall work with the participant to develop an individual responsibility plan that:

(1) sets forth an employment goal for the participant and a plan for moving the participant into employment;

(2) sets forth obligations of the participant that may include a requirement that the participant attend school, maintain certain grades and attendance, keep his school-age children in school, immunize his children or engage in other activities that will help the participant become and remain employed;

(3) is designed to the greatest extent possible to move the participant into whatever employment the participant is capable of handling and to provide additional services as necessary to increase the responsibility and amount of work the participant will handle over time;

(4) describes the services the department may provide so that the participant may obtain and keep employment; and

(5) may require the participant to undergo appropriate substance abuse treatment.

I. The participant and a representative of the department shall sign the participant's individual responsibility plan. The department shall not allow a participant to decline to participate in developing an

individual responsibility plan. The department shall not waive the requirement that a participant develop an individual responsibility plan. The department shall emphasize the importance of the individual responsibility plan to the participant.

J. If a participant does not develop an individual responsibility plan, refuses to sign an individual responsibility plan or refuses to attend semiannual reviews of an individual responsibility plan, he shall be required to enter into a conciliation pursuant to Subsection C of Section 27-2B-14 NMSA 1978. If the participant persists in noncompliance with the individual responsibility plan process after the conciliation, he shall be subject to sanctions pursuant to Section 27-2B-14 NMSA 1978.

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K. The participant shall also sign a participation agreement that designates the number of hours that he must participate in work activities to meet participation standards.

L. The department shall review the current financial eligibility of a benefit group when the department reviews food stamp eligibility.

M. The department shall meet semiannually with a participant to review and revise his individual responsibility plan.

N. The department shall develop a complaint procedure to address issues pertinent to the delivery of services and other issues relating to a participant's

individual responsibility plan." _____