S T A T E O F N E W Y O R K

10191

I N A S S E M B L Y

May 16, 2016

Introduced by M. of A. WRIGHT -- read once and referred to the Committee on Social Services

AN ACT to amend the social services law, in relation to conciliation and non-compliance with public assistance employment; and to repeal certain provisions of such law relating thereto

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. Section 341 of the social services law is REPEALED.

S 2. Section 341-a of the social services law, as added by chapter 562 of the laws of 2015, is amended to read as follows:

S [341-a] 341. Re-engagement; conciliation; refusal to participate. 1. [The provisions of this section shall apply to persons who are residents of a city having a population of one million or more people.

2.] (a) Consistent with federal law and regulations and this title, if a participant has failed or refused to comply with the requirements of this title and the district has determined that he or she is not exempt from such requirements and has verified that appropriate child care, transportation, and accommodations for disability were in place at the time of such failure or refusal, the social services district shall issue a re-engagement notice in plain language indicating that such failure or refusal has taken place and of the right of such participant to avoid a pro-rata reduction in public assistance benefits through the re-engagement process. "Re-engagement process" shall mean the process through which a participant may avoid a pro-rata reduction in public assistance benefits by agreeing to comply with the requirements of this title consistent with any medical condition which may limit the individual's ability to participate in work activities, by notifying the district that he or she has become exempt from the requirements of this title, or by resolving the reasons for such failure or refusal at a conciliation conference. The notice shall indicate that the participant has ten days to request re-engagement with the district. The notice shall indicate the specific instance or instances of willful refusal or failure to comply without good cause with the requirements of this title and the necessary actions that must be taken to avoid a pro-rata

EXPLANATION--Matter in ITALICS (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [ ] is old law to be omitted.

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reduction in public assistance benefits and the district has verified that appropriate child care, transportation and accommodations for disability were in place at the time of such failure or refusal.

(1) If a participant chooses to avoid a pro-rata reduction in public assistance benefits through a conciliation conference, it will be the responsibility of the participant to give reasons for such failure or refusal. The re-engagement notice shall also include an explanation in plain language of what would constitute good cause for non-compliance and examples of acceptable forms of evidence that may warrant an exemption from work activities, including evidence of domestic violence, and physical or mental health limitations that may be provided at the conciliation conference to demonstrate such good cause for failure to comply with the requirements of this title. Unless as part of the re-engagement process the participant does not agree to comply, has not become exempt or the district determines as a result of the conciliation conference that such failure or refusal was willful and without good cause, no further action shall be taken.

(2) If the participant does not contact the district within ten days of the re-engagement notice, the district shall make a finding of whether the alleged failure or refusal to comply was willful and without good cause and shall consider any evidence in the possession of the district indicating that the participant has good cause and if the participant is otherwise participating in work activities, there shall be no finding of willfulness without good cause based on a single appointment or infraction.

(b) If the district determines that such failure or refusal was willful and without good cause, and that the individual is not exempt from the requirements of this title, the district shall notify such participant in writing, in plain language and in a manner distinct from any previous notice, by issuing ten days notice of its intent to discontinue or reduce assistance. Such notice shall include the reasons for such determination, the specific instance or instances of willful refusal or failure to comply without good cause with the requirements of this title, shall verify that appropriate child care, transportation and accommodations for disability were in place at the time of such failure or refusal, and specify the necessary actions that must be taken to avoid a pro-rata reduction in public assistance benefits, including agreeing to comply with the requirements of this title consistent with any medical condition which may limit the individual's ability to participate in work activities or notifying the district that he or she has become exempt from the requirements of this title and the right to a fair hearing relating to such discontinuance or reduction.

[3.] 2. (a) The department shall establish in regulation a conciliation procedure for the resolution of disputes related to an individual's participation in programs pursuant to this title.

(b) The district shall contract with an independent entity, approved by the department, or shall use designated trained staff at the supervisory level who have no direct responsibility for the participant's case to mediate disputes in the conciliation conference.

(c) If a participant's dispute cannot be resolved through such conciliation procedure, an opportunity for a fair hearing shall be provided. No sanction relating to the subject dispute may be imposed during the re-engagement process.

[4.] 3. When any participant required to participate in work activities fails to comply with the provisions of this title, the social

services district shall take such actions as prescribed by appropriate federal law and regulation and this title.

[5.] 4. Consistent with federal law and this title, a social services district shall provide to those participants whose failure to comply has continued for thirty days or longer a written reminder of the option to end a sanction by terminating the failure to comply as specified in subdivision [two] ONE of this section. Such notice shall advise that the participant may immediately terminate the sanction by either agreeing to comply with the requirements of this title consistent with any medical condition which may limit the individual's ability to participate in work activities or notifying the district that he or she has become exempt from the requirements of this title.

[6.] 5. Consistent with federal law and regulation and this title, no notice shall be issued as specified in subdivision [two] ONE of this section unless it has been determined that the individual is not exempt from the requirements of this title and has determined that appropriate child care, transportation and accommodations for disability were in place at the time of such failure or refusal to comply with the requirements of this title and no action shall be taken pursuant to this section for failure to participate in the program or refusal to accept employment if:

(a) child care for a child under age thirteen (or day care for any incapacitated individual living in the same home as a dependent child) is necessary for an individual to participate or continue participation in activities pursuant to this title or accept employment and such care is not available and the social services district fails to provide such care;

(b) (1) the employment would result in the family of the participant experiencing a net loss of cash income; provided, however, a participant may not claim good cause under this paragraph if the social services district assures that the family will not experience a net loss of cash income by making a supplemental payment;

(2) net loss of cash income results if the family's gross income less necessary work-related expenses is less than the cash assistance the participant was receiving at the time the offer of employment is made; or

(c) the participant meets other grounds for good cause set forth by the department in its implementation plan for this title which, at a minimum, must describe what circumstances beyond the household's control will constitute "good cause".

S 3. Section 342 of the social services law is REPEALED.

S 4. Section 342-a of the social services law is renumbered section 342.

S 5. This act shall take effect on the first of April next succeeding the date on which it shall have become a law.