SENATE DOCKET, NO. FILED ON: 1/6/2009

**SENATE . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . No.**

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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PRESENTED BY:

**Eldridge, James - Rep. (HOU)**

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*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General  
 Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the passage of the accompanying bill:

An Act Relative to Workers’ Pathways to Self Sufficiency

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

PETITION OF:

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| --- | --- |
| Name: | District/Address: |
| Eldridge, James - Rep. (HOU) | Middlesex and Worcester |
| Linda Dorcena Forry | 12th Suffolk |

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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**In the Year Two Thousand and Nine**

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An Act Relative to Workers’ Pathways to Self Sufficiency

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

The purpose of this Act is to help low-income, low-skilled adults in Massachusetts gain employment in jobs that pay family sustaining wages by promoting and supporting activities and programs that will increase access to and successful completion of degrees or certificates.

Whereas the majority of jobs that pay family-sustaining wages in Massachusetts require some form of education or training beyond a high school diploma and whereas there are still 1.4 million people aged 25-54, nearly half the state’s workforce, without at least an associate’s degree, access and success in higher education is critical to the well-being of families, employers and to Massachusetts’ economic well-being. However, the steady erosion of funding for public higher education and financial aid has made it increasingly unaffordable for low-skilled working adults to obtain the education and training needed to support their families. In fact, Massachusetts spends far less on post-secondary education and training than other states, ranking 49th in its higher education spending as a percentage of state income. Moreover, many of the financial assistance programs in place focus on traditional student who enter college immediately following high school, have parental support and are not responsible for supporting families of their own.

Workers Pathways to Self-Sufficiency Act of 2009 seeks to achieve the maximum level of coordination and coinvestment in each of the sections by the agencies named herein, private sector employers and philanthropic organizations in Massachusetts.

Workers Pathways to Self Sufficiency Act of 2009 seeks to maintain and increase economic vitality in the Commonwealth and to promote business competitiveness, worker self sufficiency, and economic progress by supporting access and success in education and training for low income skilled adults.

# SECTION 1. Education Rewards Grant Program

Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, not less than 10 days after the effective date of this act, the comptroller shall transfer $4,500,000 from the General Fund to the Educational Rewards Grant

Program Fund established pursuant to section 2SSS of chapter 29 of the General Laws; provided that up to $1,500,000 of said funding shall be used for a “Supports for Success” pilot program to assist Educational Rewards recipients complete their degree or certificate programs; provided further, that supports provided through said pilot may include but need not be limited to intensive advising and counseling, college and career success courses, work study jobs in the students’ field of study, learning communities, curricula redesign to support blended or accelerated remediation, mentoring ortutoring, and child care and transportation assistance; provided further, that on or before December 1 of each year, the Board of Higher Education in collaboration with the Office of Student Financial Assistance shall submit to the house and senate clerks and the chairs of house and senate committees on ways and means a report describing how funds in said section 2SSS were used in the prior fiscal year, including but not limited to, how many grants were distributed to how many students and in what amounts, the level of educational attainment of grant recipients, persistence from semester to semester, degrees and certificates awarded to recipients, and analysis of the strengths and areas of needed improvement in the primary program and the pilot program and recommendations for such improvements.

**SECTION 2. Education & Training for TAFDC Recipients**

Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary and to the maximum extent possible in light of the need to preserve available sources of federal funding, it is the policy of the Commonwealth to encourage low-income parents, including those who receive assistance under the program of transitional aid to families with dependent children, to obtain the vocational educational training they need to obtain and retain good paying jobs with benefits that will enable them to support their families in the longer term. Consistent with this policy, the department of transitional assistance shall:

a) in collaboration with the workforce development system and the community college system, maintain in each local office of the department an up-to-date listing and description of all vocational educational programs within the relevant geographic region that can be accessed at little or no cost to the individual, including adult basic education, English for speakers of other languages, skills training, certificate programs, and higher education programs;

b) at least 30 days before an individual becomes subject to the work program requirement pursuant to section 110(j) of chapter 5 of the acts of 1995 and before completion of any Employment Development Plan pursuant to section 110(h) of said chapter 5, (i) inform that individual orally and in writing that said work program requirement may be met by participation in vocational educational programs, including adult basic education, English for speakers of other languages, skills training, certificate programs, and higher education programs, (ii) inform that individual of all vocational educational programs available in the relevant geographic region that can be accessed at little or no cost to the individual, and (iii) inform that individual of the policies described in subsections (e) and (f) of this section;

c) at least 30 days before an individual becomes subject to the work program requirement pursuant to section 110(j) of chapter 5 of the acts of 1995 and before completion of any Employment Development Plan pursuant to section 110(h) of said chapter 5, provide that individual with counseling on how to access vocational educational training without incurring debt, including but not limited to information on the availability of funding for such programs through the Employment Services Program, the Workforce Investment Act, PELL grants, the Educational Rewards program, the Department of Education, and appropriate referrals to such vocational educational training;

d) use funds appropriated for the department’s Employment Services Program to expand the availability of programs that integrate skills training with adult basic education for those without a high school diploma and/or English for speakers of other language instruction for those with limited English proficiency, including but not limited to programs at community colleges;

e) allow individuals to satisfy their work program requirements pursuant to said section 110(j), in whole or in part and throughout their periods of time limited benefits and any extension periods, by participating in vocational educational training programs.