

SENATE No.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Eldridge, James - Rep. (HOU)

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:

NAME:

DISTRICT/ADDRESS:

Eldridge, James - Rep. (HOU)

Middlesex and Worcester

Linda Dorcena Forry

12th Suffolk

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand and Nine

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:

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

4

5 Whereas the majority of jobs that pay family-sustaining wages in Massachusetts require
6 some form of education or training beyond a high school diploma and whereas there are still
7 1.4 million people aged 25-54, nearly half the state's workforce, without at least an associate's
8 degree, access and success in higher education is critical to the well-being of families,
9 employers and to Massachusetts' economic well-being. However, the steady erosion of funding
10 for public higher education and financial aid has made it increasingly unaffordable for low-
11 skilled working adults to obtain the education and training needed to support their families. In
12 fact, Massachusetts spends far less on post-secondary education and training than other
13 states, ranking 49th in its higher education spending as a percentage of state income.
14 Moreover, many of the financial assistance programs in place focus on traditional student who
15 enter college immediately following high school, have parental support and are not responsible
16 for supporting families of their own.

17

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

21

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

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27 **SECTION 1. Education Rewards Grant Program**

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

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

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

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

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

64

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

74

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

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

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