

**§2065. Peer workforce navigator pilot program**

**1. Peer workforce navigator pilot program.** No later than January 1, 2022, the Commissioner of Labor, referred to in this subchapter as "the commissioner," shall adopt a peer workforce navigator pilot program to support the Governor's Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan dated May 4, 2021. The Department of Labor, referred to in this subchapter as "the department," shall contract with qualified entities to operate the pilot program for a period of 2 years. The pilot program must:

A. Target underserved populations as described in subsection 2, paragraph A to expand opportunities for employment through reemployment services, education or training opportunities, apprenticeships and other models that result in skill development and family-supporting careers; [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

B. Assist individuals with meeting basic needs in order to help them persist in education and work; [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

C. Connect individuals with services and job training programs provided by career centers operated by the department or its workforce partners, including the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System; [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

D. Conduct outreach and provide individual assistance and education to individuals applying for and making ongoing claims for unemployment compensation benefits, including partial unemployment benefits and assistance for dislocated or marginalized workers; and [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

E. Identify systemic issues creating barriers to successful reemployment for individuals seeking jobs, including improvements to the unemployment compensation system in chapter 13 to reduce those barriers. [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

**2. Qualified entities.** To be eligible to receive a navigator contract under this section, an entity must:

A. Demonstrate that it has existing peer relationships with underserved populations, including immigrants, individuals with limited English proficiency, inexperienced and untrained individuals, low-income and homeless individuals, individuals who have been out of the workforce for an extended period, individuals with low literacy and individuals with disabilities; [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

B. Have the capability to carry out the duties of this section, including knowledge of eligibility requirements and application processes related to the unemployment compensation system in chapter 13, reemployment services, education and training services and other resources necessary to help underserved populations increase their economic security; [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

C. Comply with existing confidentiality standards to ensure the privacy of all information collected from individuals receiving navigator services; and [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

D. Provide services under this section without charge to the individuals receiving those services. [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

**3. Commissioner's duties; award criteria; navigator services.** The commissioner shall establish standards for the awarding of contracts to qualified entities in accordance with this subsection.

A. The commissioner may award multiple contracts to perform one or more of the navigator services described in this section. [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

B. To support the maintenance of relationships between qualified entities and underserved populations and to ensure a high quality of service, the commissioner shall award contracts to

qualified entities for the duration of the pilot period as long as the qualified entities satisfy performance standards set forth in the contracts. [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

C. The commissioner shall give priority for navigator contracts to qualified entities that are a recognized source of support or advocacy for underserved populations as described in subsection 2, paragraph A, such as racial and ethnic minorities, persons with low literacy, persons with disabilities and others seeking to improve skills and gain employment. [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

D. Navigator services provided by qualified entities that receive navigator contracts must be coordinated with and supplement, not supplant, services provided by the department. [PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

All navigator services provided under this subsection must be performed in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate to the population served, including individuals with limited English proficiency, persons with low literacy and persons with disabilities, recognizing the varying levels of digital literacy and access to technology among individuals in need of services.

[PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

**4. Funding.** The department shall seek available workforce development funds for the pilot program under this section.

[PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).]

#### SECTION HISTORY

PL 2021, c. 456, §37 (NEW).

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