

ASSEMBLY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR **SENATE, No. 4102**

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 3, 2022

The Assembly Higher Education Committee reports favorably a Senate Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 4102.

This bill establishes a center for direct support professionals by the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development and makes an appropriation of \$450,000 for the bill's purposes.

This bill establishes a Direct Support Professional Career Development Center at the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development in partnership with a trade association serving organizations that employ direct support professionals. The purpose of the center will be to provide a potential career path to high school students at-risk of failing to graduate in addition to existing direct support professionals (DSPs), thereby assisting with recruitment and retention of this critical workforce.

The bill provides that the center, through partnerships with local school districts, will identify and recruit high school students "at risk" of not graduating from high school who have not pursued vocational education or any other alternative education program, and who are interested in learning about and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The center will provide participating students with a two year program that offers mentorship and training regarding the responsibilities of DSPs and a potential job opportunity upon graduation. The program will provide online training in addition to on-site training and mentorship with experienced DSPs employed by participating agencies that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The bill provides that, upon completion of the program, a participating student will receive academic credits and the school district at which the student is enrolled shall apply the credits towards the district requirements for high school graduation. The student will also be offered an opportunity to interview for employment as a DSP at the agency where the student received on-site training. The agency will interview the student for a position with compensation that reflects the experience and training received through the program.

In addition to “at risk” students, the Direct Support Professional Career Development Center will work with existing and future DSPs to identify their educational goals including credentialing, an associate’s Degree and a bachelor’s Degree.

The bill requires the Direct Support Professional Career Development Center to employ a career counselor, who will provide ongoing support to participating high school students as well as DSPs and assist in the establishment of a Career Development Program.

The bill provides for the establishment, in collaboration with the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, of a Career Development Program for new and existing DSPs at the Direct Support Professional Career Development Center. The center will assist individuals employed as a DSP with the pursuit of a college degree. It will be the purpose of the Career Development Program to create a career path for the recruitment and retention of DSPs.

Under the bill, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges will, as part of New Jersey’s Workforce Development initiative, develop curriculum specific to the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities including an associates’ degree and bachelors’ degree.

Finally, the bill provides for the appropriation of \$450,000 from the General Fund to the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education for the purposes of fulfilling the bill’s provisions. The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education will distribute a grant to the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development in partnership with a trade association serving organizations that employ DSPs to establish the Direct Support Professional Career Development Center by such criteria as are determined by the Secretary of Higher Education.

As reported by the committee, this bill is identical to Assembly Bill No. 6230, which was also reported by the committee on this same date.