

Council Substitute for House Bill No. 843

An act relating to the Family Readiness Program; amending s. 250.5206, F.S.; expanding purpose, eligibility, and annual report provisions of the Family Readiness Program within the Department of Military Affairs; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 250.5206, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

250.5206 Family Readiness Program.—The Department of Military Affairs shall establish ~~the a state~~ Family Readiness Program headed by a program director and based on the United States Department of Defense National Guard and Reserve Family Readiness Strategic Plan 2004-2005 initiative.

(1) PROGRAM PURPOSE.—The purpose of the program ~~is shall be~~ to provide need-based financial assistance to eligible families of servicemembers of the Florida National Guard and United States Reserve Forces, including the Coast Guard Reserves, who are on active duty serving in the Global War on Terrorism and who are federally deployed or participating in state operations for homeland defense, and eligible families of such servicemembers.

(2) FUNDING.—Implementation of the program is subject to appropriations expressly provided for this purpose.

(3) ELIGIBLE SERVICES.—Program funds may be used in emergency situations to purchase critically needed services, including, but not limited to, reasonable living expenses, housing, vehicles, equipment or renovations necessary to meet disability needs, and health care.

(4) ELIGIBILITY.—

(a) The following persons are eligible to receive financial assistance from the Family Readiness Program:

1. Florida residents who are members of the Florida National Guard and United States Reserve Forces, including the Coast Guard Reserves, who are on active duty serving in the Global War on Terrorism and who are federally deployed or participating in state operations for homeland defense; and

2. Florida residents who are designated as beneficiaries on the United States Department of Defense Form 93, or who are otherwise dependents, of a servicemember eligible under subparagraph 1. and who are family members of such servicemember.

(b) An eligible person may request financial assistance from the Family Readiness Program for 120 days following termination of the eligible servicemember's military orders for qualifying service and return to home of

~~record. Eligible recipients shall include persons designated as beneficiaries on the United States Department of Defense Form 93, or who are otherwise dependents of eligible servicemembers, and who are residents of the State of Florida. The period of eligibility to request assistance from the fund continues for 120 days following termination of the service member's military orders for qualifying service and return to home of record.~~

(5) REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE; REVIEW; AWARDS.—Requests for assistance shall be validated and assessed at the local level by a federal Family Center Support Specialist stationed at a state armory or at a reserve facility by a designated official. Recommendations subsequent to assessment and validation shall be forwarded to the program director, who shall review the recommendations for eligibility, appropriateness, and sufficiency of documentation. The Adjutant General or his or her designee shall receive the recommendations from the program director and is authorized to award funds pursuant to subsections (3) and (4).

(6) AUDITS.—The inspector general of the department shall conduct a semiannual review and an annual audit of the program.

(7) ANNUAL REPORT.—The department shall maintain sufficient data to provide an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature on the servicemembers and families served under the program, the types of services provided, and the allocation of funds spent.

(8) RULES.—The department is authorized to adopt rules necessary to implement this program, including procedures for applying for assistance, qualifying services, and criteria for eligibility.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2008.

Approved by the Governor May 28, 2008.

Filed in Office Secretary of State May 28, 2008.