

HOUSE BILL 698

By Terry

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4 and Title 71, Chapter 4, Part 6, relative to vocational rehabilitation services for the blind.

WHEREAS, the Department of Human Services is responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to persons who are blind, and these services are intended to enable such persons to become gainfully employed in a competitive and integrated setting; and

WHEREAS, adjustment to blindness services are services generally required by persons who are blind, so that they may successfully engage in employment; and

WHEREAS, structured discovery learning techniques have been demonstrated to be effective in teaching people who are blind the necessary blindness skills to be gainfully employed; and

WHEREAS, there is not a structured discovery rehabilitation center in Tennessee, therefore most people who are blind are denied access to these types of services; and

WHEREAS, the number of people who are blind and who become employed as the result of vocational rehabilitation services remains at an unacceptable level in Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 71, Chapter 4, Part 6, is amended by adding the following as a new, appropriately designated section:

(a) There is established a task force concerning vocational rehabilitation services for persons who are blind.

(b) The commissioner of human services shall convene the task force. The task force shall develop recommendations to the general assembly related to the delivery of

adjustment to blindness services to vocational rehabilitation clients who are blind, the appropriateness of establishing a structured discovery center in Tennessee, and the appropriate organizational structure to ensure quality vocational rehabilitation services are provided to persons who are blind.

(c) The majority of persons serving on the task force shall be blind.

(d) The task force shall consist of:

(1) Two (2) staff members of the department of human services appointed by the commissioner. One (1) staff member shall be at the program director or assistant commissioner level and the second shall be a vocational rehabilitation counselor;

(2) Two (2) persons appointed by the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Tennessee;

(3) A person who is blind and who serves on the state rehabilitation council and is appointed by the commissioner;

(4) A person who is blind and either serves on or works for the Statewide Independent Living Council or one of the independent living centers; provided, further, this person shall be appointed by the commissioner;

(5) A person, as mutually agreed to by the commissioner or the commissioner's designee and the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Tennessee, who is blind and who has attended a rehabilitation center that practices structured discovery; and

(6) A person, as mutually agreed to by the commissioner or the commissioner's designee and the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Tennessee who is a certified teacher of the visually impaired and employed by a local school district or the Tennessee School for the Blind.

SECTION 2. The task force concerning vocational rehabilitation services for blind persons created by Section 1 of this act shall terminate on June 30, 2017.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.