

CHAPTER 334

AN ACT creating YouthBuild programs, supplementing Title 34 of the Revised Statutes, and making an appropriation.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.34:15D-35 Short title.

1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the “New Jersey YouthBuild Act.”

C.34:15D-36 “New Jersey YouthBuild Act”, purpose.

2. The purpose of the “New Jersey YouthBuild Act” shall be to:

- a. Enable economically disadvantaged youth, especially youth who have not finished high school, to obtain the education, job skills training, personal counseling, leadership development skills training, job placement assistance, and long-term follow-up leading to economic self-sufficiency;

- b. Provide communities the opportunity to establish or rebuild neighborhood stability in economically depressed and low-income areas, as well as historic areas requiring restoration or preservation, while providing economically disadvantaged youth and youth who have not finished high school an opportunity for meaningful participation in society;

- c. Allow communities to maintain and expand the supply of affordable housing for homeless and other low-income individuals by utilizing the energies and talents of economically disadvantaged youth and young people who have not graduated from high school; and

- d. Foster the development of leadership skills and a commitment to community development among youth.

C.34:15D-37 Definitions.

3. As used in this act:

"Applicant" means a public or private not-for-profit agency eligible to provide education and employment training under federal or State employment training programs.

"Commissioner" means the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

"Department" means the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

"Eligible entity" means a public or private nonprofit agency or organization, including a consortium of public or private nonprofit agencies or organizations, including but not limited to: a community-based organization;

a faith-based organization;

an entity carrying out activities under this act, such as a local board;

a community action agency;

a State or local housing development agency;

an Indian tribe or other agency primarily serving Indians;

a community development corporation;

a State or local youth service or conservation corps; and

any other entity eligible to provide education or employment training under a federal program (other than the program carried out under this section).

"YouthBuild" means the program established by this act that provides disadvantaged youth with opportunities for comprehensive education, employment, leadership development, and training in the construction or rehabilitation of housing for special needs populations, very low-income households, and low-income households.

C.34:15D-38 Department of Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner, grants, YouthBuild programs, services.

4. a. The commissioner shall, subject to appropriation, make grants to applicants for the purpose of carrying out YouthBuild programs as approved under this section. All programs funded pursuant to the provisions of this section shall reflect strong youth and community involvement. In addition, funding provided under this section shall be used by each YouthBuild program to provide, at a minimum, the following services:

(1) integrated education and job skills training services and activities which are evenly divided within the program, with 50 percent of students' time spent in classroom-based instruction, counseling, and leadership development instruction and 50 percent of their time spent in service learning experiences at construction sites. The programs shall include, at a minimum, the following elements:

(a) an education component which includes basic skills instruction, secondary education services, and other activities designed to lead to the attainment of a high school diploma or its equivalent. The curriculum for this component shall include math, language arts, vocational education, life skills training, social studies related to the cultural and community history of the students, leadership skills, and other topics at the discretion of the programs;

(b) a vocational learning experience and skills training component apprenticeship program that includes the construction and rehabilitation activities described in paragraph (4) of this subsection. The process of construction shall be tied with skills training and with close on-site supervision by experienced trainers. The curriculum for this component shall contain a set of locally agreed upon skills and competencies that are systematically taught, with a student's mastery assessed individually on a regular, ongoing basis. Safety skills shall be taught at the outset. The vocational learning experience and skills training component shall be coordinated to the maximum extent feasible with pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. In order to receive grant funding, programs shall offer vocational learning experiences that conclude with the administration of assessments to obtain an industry-valued credential, per the list provided by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development; and

(c) assistance in attaining post-secondary education and required financial aid to be made available to participants prior to graduation;

(2) counseling services designed to assist participants to positively participate in society, which should include all of the following if necessary: outreach, assessment, and orientation; individual and peer counseling; life skills training, drug and alcohol abuse education and prevention; and referral to appropriate drug rehabilitation, medical, mental health, legal, housing, and other services and resources in the community;

(3) leadership development training that provides participants with meaningful opportunities to develop leadership skills such as decision making, problem solving, and negotiating. The program shall also encourage participants to develop strong peer group ties that support their mutual pursuit of skills and values. All programs shall establish a youth council in which participants are afforded opportunities to develop public speaking and negotiating skills and management and policy-making participation in specific aspects of the program; and

(4) assistance with the acquisition, rehabilitation, acquisition and rehabilitation, or construction of housing and related facilities which will serve as the vocational training sites and then to be used for the purpose of providing home ownership for disadvantaged persons, residential housing for homeless individuals, and low-income and very low-income families, or transitional housing for persons who are homeless, have disabilities, are ill, are de-

institutionalized, or have special needs and rehabilitation or construction of community facilities owned by not-for-profit or public agencies.

b. A YouthBuild program shall provide a stipend to participants to cover the costs associated with their full-time participation in the program. The stipend shall not be considered as income in determining eligibility for other State or federal assistance programs. Stipends may be distributed in a manner that offers incentives for good performance.

c. Full-time participation in a YouthBuild program shall be offered for a period of not less than six months and not more than 24 months.

d. A concentrated effort shall be made to find jobs for all graduates of the program who have performed well. The skills training curriculum shall provide participants with basic preparation for seeking and maintaining a job. Follow-up counseling and assistance in job-seeking shall also be provided to participants for the 12 months following graduation from the program.

e. All programs serving 20 trainees or more are required to have a full-time director responsible for the coordination of all aspects of the YouthBuild program.

C.34:15D-39 YouthBuild, eligible participants, age range, economic status, specified group membership.

5. a. Eligible participants in a YouthBuild program shall be youth, 16 to 24 years old, who are economically disadvantaged as defined in 29 U.S.C. s.1503, and who are part of one of at least one of the following groups:

(1) persons who are not attending any school and not received a secondary school diploma or its equivalent;

(2) persons currently enrolled in a traditional or alternative school setting or a high school equivalency testing program and who are in danger of dropping out of school; or

(3) a member of a low-income family, a youth in foster care (including a youth aging out of foster care), a youth offender, a youth with a disability, a child of incarcerated parents, or a migrant youth.

b. Not more than 25 percent of participants in the program may be individuals who do not meet the requirements of paragraphs (1) or (2) of subsection a. of this section, but who are deficient in basic skills despite having attained a secondary school diploma, high school equivalency certificate, or other State-recognized equivalent, or who have been referred by a local secondary school for participation in a YouthBuild program leading to the attainment of a secondary school diploma.

C.34:15D-40 Eligible entities to be awarded funds, experience operating YouthBuild programs, Housing and Urban Development YouthBuild grant.

6. Eligible entities to be awarded funds under this act are not-for-profit private agencies with experience operating a YouthBuild program or entities that have received a federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) YouthBuild grant or have experience in serving this population and have plans to incubate a YouthBuild program. Priority in the awarding of funds under this act shall be given to applicants with experience in operating YouthBuild programs or organizations that have received HUD YouthBuild funding. Only not-for-profit private agencies that are affiliates of YouthBuild USA or have received a federal HUD YouthBuild grant shall be eligible to use the term YouthBuild.

C.34:15D-41 YouthBuild funds application requirements.

7. The commissioner shall require that an application for YouthBuild funds under this act contain at a minimum:

- a. A request for an implementation grant, specifying the amount of the grant requested and its proposed uses;
- b. A description of the applicant and a statement of its qualifications, including a description of the applicant's past experience running a YouthBuild program; with housing rehabilitation or construction; and with youth, youth education, youth leadership development and employment training programs, and other relevant community organizations;
- c. A description of the educational and job training activities, work opportunities, and other services that will be provided to participants;
- d. A description of the proposed construction or rehabilitation activities to be undertaken and the anticipated schedule for carrying out those activities;
- e. A description of the manner in which eligible youths will be recruited and selected, including a description of the arrangements which will be made with community-based organizations, local educational agencies, public assistance agencies, the courts of jurisdiction for status and youth offenders, shelters for homeless individuals and other agencies that serve homeless youth, foster care agencies, and other appropriate public and private agencies;
- f. A description of the special efforts that will be undertaken to recruit eligible young women (including young women with dependent children) with plans for addressing appropriate supports they may need, especially childcare;
- g. A description of how the proposed program will be coordinated with other youth-serving agencies in the service area;
- h. Assurances that there will be a sufficient number of adequately trained supervisory personnel in the program who have attained the level of journeyman or its equivalent;
- i. A description of the applicant's relationship with any local building trade unions, which may exist, regarding their involvement in training, and the relationship of the YouthBuild program with established apprenticeship programs;
- j. A description of activities that will be undertaken to develop the leadership skills of participants, including their role in decision making;
- k. A detailed budget and a description of the system of fiscal controls and auditing and accountability procedures that will be used to ensure fiscal soundness;
- l. A description of any contracts and arrangements entered into between the applicant and other agencies and entities including all in-kind donations and grants from both public and private entities that will serve to augment State YouthBuild funds;
- m. The qualifications and past experience of the person who will fill the full-time program director position; and
- n. Other information or factors as deemed necessary by the commissioner.

C.34:15D-42 YouthBuild applicant selected for funding, provide information, certain; Department of Labor and Workforce Development, evaluation report, Governor, Legislature.

8. a. An applicant selected for funding under this act shall provide to the department information on program and participant outcomes, including but not limited to: attendance, retention, GED attainment, high school diplomas issued, educational improvement levels, placement, construction outcomes, and community service accomplishments.

b. The department shall prepare and submit annual evaluation reports to the Governor and the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1) on the progress of individual programs funded under this act. The department shall prepare and submit a final

evaluation report to the Governor and the Legislature, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), on individual programs at the times of program completion. The final evaluation report shall include, but not be limited to, information on the effectiveness of the program, the status of program participants, and recommendations on program administration at the State and local level. The Department shall submit the first evaluation report by July 1, 2024, and subsequent annual reports by July 1 of each year thereafter.

9. Subject to the availability of federal funds provided or made accessible to the State via federal block grant funds allocated to the State from the federal “CARES Act,” Pub.L. 116-136, the “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021,” Pub.L. 117-2, or other federal funding sources, an amount determined by the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development, not to exceed \$4.5 million, shall be made available to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to effectuate the purposes of this act, subject to the approval of the Director of Budget and Accounting in the Office of Management and Budget.

10. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 16, 2024.