

## **Appendix B**

### **Sample Barrier Reduction Policy**

#### **Background:**

For people facing entrenched barriers to employment, particularly women and people of color, the process of finding a good-paying job along a career pathway can be especially challenging. These systemic and structural barriers can manifest as limited affordable childcare options, lack of transportation access, inadequate or unaffordable healthcare, and housing instability resulting from public disinvestment in those services.

These systemic challenges have been compounded by the health and economic crises caused by COVID-19. Millions of Illinoisans have experienced loss of a job or income. As the economy re-opens and many employers seek to hire, marginalized job seekers are experiencing numerous built-up emergency costs (such as back rent, utilities, transportation costs, technology access, childcare costs, and other basic needs) threatening their successful participation in workforce services and the labor market. They will also face different remote work conditions requiring access to technology and other “work-related tools” never before included in support services policies. This is an opportunity to create a more robust and flexible pool of funding and reduce unnecessary administrative barriers to accessing them to aid in an equitable economic recovery that also addresses longstanding disparities in income and wealth along lines of race and gender.

#### **Purpose of this fund:**

- To increase employment among unemployed or underemployed people in Illinois who face systemic barriers to employment, and to reduce race and gender disparities in employment and income in Illinois.

#### **Types and amounts of expenses covered:**

- A participant or the participant’s household may receive direct financial assistance that assists them in overcoming a barrier that is preventing them from advancing an employment or training goal. The fund is designed to provide flexible, individualized, timely assistance to address a wide range of possible barriers, including those that may not be covered by traditional “supportive services” through other workforce or education funding sources, including by reimbursing for emergency needs at higher amounts than other sources. Authorized uses for these funds include:
  - Emergency housing costs:
    - Rent Arrears;
    - First Month’s Rent;
    - Security Deposit/Move-in fee (if not covered by a housing program);
    - Application fees/background/credit check fees;
    - Key deposits;
    - Utility bills: arrears to have service connected and/or help the participant get on a payment plan;
    - Relocation/moving expenses;
    - State Identification or Driver’s License costs or fees associated with any other documentation that will assist in obtaining housing;
    - Storage unit;

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- Employment/training barrier reduction:
  - Transportation costs:
  - Car repairs;
  - Auto liability insurance;
  - Driver's license reinstatement fees;
  - SR-22 fees;
  - Vehicle Registration fees;
  - Public transportation fares, including monthly passes;
  - Gas;
  - Borrowing/renting car;
  - Security deposit for the driver of a carpool vehicle to transport a group of workers to a work site or a group of customers to an activity site;
  - Taxi or rideshare costs to get to/from interviews or job site;
  - Ticket fines and fees, if those fines and fees are resulting in the impoundment of a vehicle or suspension/hold on their vehicle license or registration;
  - Bike repairs.
- Access to technology to facilitate participation in education, training, or job search activities:
  - Affordable laptops or tablets (perhaps with specific models approved for purchase under this fund);
  - Equipment such as modems or routers to establish in-home internet connection;
  - Wireless hotspot devices;
  - In-home internet access.
- Costs related to enrollment or completion of education and/or training:
  - Mandatory entrance fees into apprenticeships, educational, or training programs;
  - Tools, books, occupational gear and equipment, or supplies needed for education or training;
  - Uniform or professional dress costs;
  - Required medical services/physical exam;
  - Tuition, fees, and costs related to enrolling in post-secondary education, including repaying unpaid tuition/fees that may be preventing re-enrollment.
- Childcare, including support for "gaps" in childcare while waiting for eligibility/enrollment in state child care assistance programs;
- Addressing legal barriers:
  - Background check fees;
  - Criminal record sealing/expungement fees;
  - Court fines/fees that are preventing moving forward with a criminal record sealing/expungement;
  - Occupational licensing fees;
  - Legal services fees.
- Cell phone costs when needed for job search;
- PO Box costs;

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- Translation or interpretation services related to job search;
- Personal hygiene items.
- Health care:
  - Mental health care services;
  - Substance use treatment services;
  - Other expenses that may not be covered by Medicaid or other insurance: emergency dental work, inoculations, eye examinations, and eyeglasses.
- Addressing Benefits Cliffs:
  - Direct cash assistance to provide transitional support to mitigate “benefits cliffs” during the initial period of employment.
- This is meant to be a flexible fund. Expenses not listed above may be considered on a case-by-case basis if the applicant can show how the expense will address an emergency or employment barrier.

#### **Structure/Administration:**

- *Workforce program model:* Allow workforce service providers to apply directly for funds to make available to program participants. Provide the funding to organizations up front to ensure they can quickly distribute funds to address time-sensitive needs.
- *Intermediary model:* Appoint one or more intermediary organizations to administer the funds on behalf of DCEO, allowing any organization or individual to apply directly for qualifying expenses. Intermediaries should be able to process applications quickly, releasing funds to eligible applicants within a matter of days.

#### **Required documentation:**

- Every effort should be made to minimize the administrative burden required of individuals and organizations to access this funding.
- If it is difficult to provide documentation regarding an emergency expense, a person should have the option to submit a signed affidavit outlining the expense and how it will address a barrier to an employment goal.