



PUBLIC POLICY & INFORMATION

Promoting Addiction Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Through Advocacy and Education

POSITION PAPER **No. 7/214th Legislature** **(2010-11)**

ISSUE:

Allows certain child support obligors in arrears to apply for certain licenses, provided the applicant has made 12 consecutive timely child support payments.

BILL NO.

S-2497 (Cunningham)

A-3350 (Spencer, Continho)

NCADD-NJ POSITION:

NCADD-New Jersey The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey (NCADD—NJ) strongly supports S-2497/A-3350. This is an important bill for those in recovery from addiction trying to rebuild their lives, engage in meaningful employment and take care of their responsibilities, such as paying child support. People that are engaged in recovery want to give back to their community and many people pursue careers as addiction counselors. They complete their schooling and their training, and they consistently pay their child support. However, when they go to get a license they are unable to due to child support arrears that accrued. This prevents them from becoming counselors, obtaining employment that pays a reasonable wage, and continuing to pay reasonable child support and pay down the amount in arrears.

Certain statutes and administrative policies, although enacted with understandable intentions, can present unreasonable roadblocks to successful reentry and reintegration, particularly for people in recovery from an addiction. The current law is one of these laws. Child support arrears leave people with enormous debt that may take years to resolve, particularly if they are prevented from advancing in their career. It results in additional sanctions like driver's license

suspension or an inability to get a professional license, regardless of whether the person is currently paying child support.

When one is in the grips of addiction or is incarcerated for alcohol- or drug-related crimes, child support continues to accrue, resulting in thousands upon thousands of dollars in back support. Paying child support while incarcerated is almost impossible and very few prisoners are aware that they can request that the support order be suspended pending their release. Research indicates that incarcerated parents owe on average of more than \$20,000 when they are released from prison.

Measures to address the child support issue require a careful balancing between legitimate restrictions and providing individuals appropriate opportunities to successfully reintegrate. Such a balance ultimately promotes an opportunity to pay off this tremendous debt and take care of their children. S-2497/A-3350 finds a just balance, by requiring the individual to consistently pay child support for one year before relief can be granted.

In order to enhance the employability of individuals in recovery from an addiction legislation such as this one needs to be enacted. It provides reasonable relief from collateral sanctions in appropriate cases, where certain objective criteria are met, and such relief is consistent with the intent of the sanction.

This bill opens appropriate employment options for individuals in recovery. It allows individuals willing to take positive steps to reintegrate with their families and communities to be supported and holds the individual accountable for taking care of their family. Individuals who have been rehabilitated and are in recovery should not be prohibited from employment opportunities due to past child support. Repeatedly punishing someone in recovery with collateral consequences is contrary all re-entry efforts.



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S-2497/A-3350 has the potential to assist people transition successfully back into the community and become gainfully employed, while holding individuals accountable for their child support debt.

Employment is an important factor for recovering people trying to rebuild their lives. Lack of employment, poverty and idleness contribute to ongoing addiction and recidivism, while meaningful employment promotes recovery.

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