

JUVENILE JUSTICE LOAN FORGIVENESS PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Establishing the Juvenile Justice Workforce Loan Forgiveness Program for Commonwealth residents who graduate from institutions of higher education and who apply their degrees to careers in the field of juvenile justice ; and prescribing powers and duties of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Short title.

This act shall be known and may be cited as the Juvenile Justice Workforce Loan Forgiveness Act.

Section 2. Declaration of purpose.

The primary purpose of a Juvenile Justice Workforce Loan Forgiveness Program is to attract capable and promising students to the juvenile justice profession and to increase employment and retention of individuals who are working toward or who have received either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree in criminal justice, social work, psychology or sociology.

Section 3. Definitions.

The following words and phrases when used in this act shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the context clearly indicates otherwise: "Certified juvenile justice employer." An agency certified by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency as employing juvenile justice workers as provided for under section 4(c). "Juvenile Justice worker." A staff person who: (1) holds a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree in the field of criminal justice, social work, psychology or sociology; (2) is employed by a public or private agency serving delinquent children or those children who have been referred for juvenile justice diversionary services; and (3) works in any of the following functional areas in delivery of balanced and restorative practices:

- (i) juvenile probation;
- (ii) juvenile detention or community-based detention alternative programs;
- (iii) a licensed program under the 3800 regulations; and
- (iv) in the provision of screening, assessment, or testing of risks, needs or responsivity.

"PHEAA." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

"Program." The Juvenile Justice Workforce Loan Forgiveness Program established under this act.

"Qualified applicant." A person who meets all of the following criteria:

- (1) Is a resident of this Commonwealth.
- (2) Has successfully completed a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree in the field of social work, psychology or sociology at an accredited institution of higher education.
- (3) Has been hired as a full-time employee of a certified juvenile justice employer.

(4) Has borrowed through and has a current outstanding balance on a Federal Stafford, Graduate PLUS or Consolidation Loan Programs administered by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

Section 4. Juvenile Justice Workforce Loan Forgiveness Program.

(a) Establishment.--The Juvenile Justice Workforce Loan Forgiveness Program is established in PHEAA. PHEAA shall administer the program.

(b) Nature of program.--For each year that a qualified applicant is employed by a certified child welfare employer, PHEAA may forgive a proportional part of the applicant's student loan so that the loan may be partially or entirely forgiven.

(c) Employer eligibility.--Eligible certified child welfare employers for purposes of the program shall include county juvenile probation agencies charged with enforcing 42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 63 (the Juvenile Act) and private providers who serve youth who have been adjudicated dependent or delinquent and other entities as determined by PHEAA.

(d) Limitations.--

(1) For qualified applicants with an undergraduate degree, no more than \$2,500 shall be forgiven in any one year and no more than \$10,000 shall be forgiven for any one qualified applicant.

(2) For qualified applicants with both an undergraduate degree and either a master's or doctoral degree, no more than \$5,000 shall be forgiven in any one year and no more than \$20,000 shall be forgiven for any one qualified applicant.

(3) PHEAA shall establish procedures for making payments to qualified applicants.

(4) No qualified applicant may receive a larger amount of forgiveness than the outstanding balance the applicant has with the Guaranteed Stafford or Consolidation Loan Programs administered by PHEAA.

(e) Eligibility.--A qualified applicant shall be eligible for loan forgiveness regardless of whether the applicant's outstanding loan balance is acquired before or after the date of the effective date of this section, and no loan forgiveness shall be given for years of service before the date of this section.

Section 5. Qualifications for loan forgiveness awards.

(a) Application.--PHEAA shall establish procedures for qualified applicants to apply and be approved for participation in the program.

(b) Employment.--Recipients of loan forgiveness awards must be full-time employees of a certified child welfare employer who maintain satisfactory employment with the organization and agree to continue employment with a certified child welfare employer for a least three years after the end of their participation in the program.

(c) Documentation.--PHEAA may require qualified applicants who are participating in the program to submit documentation in order to maintain continued eligibility for the program.

Section 6. Funding.

Loan forgiveness awards under this act may be made to the extent that funds are appropriated by the General Assembly or available from other sources and are sufficient to cover the administration of the program. In the event that funding is insufficient to fully fund administration and all eligible applicants, priority shall be given to renewal applicants.

Thereafter, PHEAA shall utilize a random lottery system for determining which applicants receive loan forgiveness awards.

Section 7. Tax applicability.

Loan forgiveness repayments shall not be considered taxable income for purposes of Article III of the act of March 4, 1971 (P.L.6, No.2), known as the Tax Reform Code of 1971.

Section 8. Annual report.

(a) Development of report.--PHEAA shall publish a report by October 1, 2018, and every year thereafter for the immediately preceding fiscal year. The report shall provide information regarding the operation of the program, including:

(1) The number and amount of child welfare worker loan forgiveness grants issued and renewed for qualified applicants.

(2) The number and type of enforcement actions taken by the agency.

(b) Submission.--The annual report shall be submitted to the Governor, the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Appropriations Committee of the Senate, the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives, the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Education Committee of the Senate, the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Education Committee of the House of Representatives, the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Public Health and Welfare Committee of the Senate and the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Human Services Committee of the House of Representatives.

Section 9. Responsibility of PHEAA.

PHEAA shall administer the program and shall adopt such regulations, policies, procedures and forms as are necessary and not inconsistent with the provisions of this act.

Section 10. Effective date.

This act shall take effect in 60 days.