
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 725 Session of
2023

INTRODUCED BY CIRESI, PROBST, HOWARD, T. DAVIS, MADDEN, ROZZI,
GUENST, SANCHEZ, DELLOSO, HILL-EVANS, FIEDLER, PARKER,
CERRATO AND MALAGARI, MARCH 28, 2023

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, MARCH 28, 2023

AN ACT

1 Amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled "An
2 act relating to the public school system, including certain
3 provisions applicable as well to private and parochial
4 schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing the
5 laws relating thereto," establishing the Mental Health
6 Professional Student Loan Forgiveness Program; imposing
7 powers and duties on the Pennsylvania Higher Education
8 Assistance Agency; and making an appropriation.

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

11 Section 1. The act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known
12 as the Public School Code of 1949, is amended by adding an
13 article to read:

14 ARTICLE XXII-C

15 MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

16 STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM

17 Section 2201-C. Definitions.

18 The following words and phrases when used in this article
19 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
20 context clearly indicates otherwise:

1 "Agency." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance
2 Agency.

3 "Mental health field." A profession associated with
4 completing any of the fields of study enumerated under section
5 2202-C(b)(2).

6 "Program." The Mental Health Professional Student Loan
7 Forgiveness Program established under section 2202-C(a).

8 "Qualified applicant." An individual who meets all of the
9 criteria under section 2202-C(b).

10 "Recipient." A qualified applicant who is selected by the
11 agency for participation in the program.

12 Section 2202-C. Mental Health Professional Student Loan
13 Forgiveness Program.

14 (a) Establishment.--The Mental Health Professional Student
15 Loan Forgiveness Program is established within the agency.

16 (b) Qualifications.--To qualify for the program, an
17 applicant must make an application to the agency and meet all of
18 the following criteria:

19 (1) Be a resident of this Commonwealth.

20 (2) Have completed at least one-half of the credit hours
21 needed to earn an undergraduate or master's academic degree
22 or diploma in social work, counseling, psychology,
23 psychiatry, nursing or another degree in the human services
24 field.

25 (3) Have a recommendation from the faculty of the
26 employer of which the applicant is employed or, if the
27 applicant is enrolled in coursework for a degree listed in
28 paragraph (2), from a professor under whom the applicant has
29 taken coursework.

30 (4) Be employed to, or have been hired to, work in the

1 mental health field focusing on early childhood through
2 adolescence.

3 (c) Program components.--

4 (1) An application must be made to the agency on or
5 before the deadline for submittal of the application as
6 established by the agency for participation in the program.

7 (2) The application shall contain all of the information
8 required under subsection (b) and demonstrate that the
9 applicant satisfies the required criteria.

10 (3) A qualified applicant may not submit another
11 application after satisfactorily completing the program,
12 withdrawing from the program or failing to satisfactorily
13 comply with the program requirements as determined by the
14 agency.

15 (4) A recipient shall be eligible for a financial award
16 payment by the agency of a portion of the debt incurred by
17 the recipient through the agency-administered Guaranteed
18 Stafford or Consolidation Loan Programs if the recipient:

19 (i) graduates from a university that is part of the
20 State System of Higher Education with a minimum B average
21 grade; and

22 (ii) enters into a contract with the agency that
23 requires the recipient to remain employed in the mental
24 health field focusing on early childhood through
25 adolescence for at least seven years.

26 (5) The agency may grant an award to the recipient of up
27 to \$22,500 which may be applied directly by the agency to the
28 recipient's agency-administered Guaranteed Stafford or
29 Consolidation Loan Program debt balance or, for a recipient
30 who is currently enrolled at the university, the award may be

1 direct cash assistance.

2 (6) Payment shall be made in accordance with the
3 procedures established by the agency.

4 (7) Financial award payment may not be made by the
5 agency, and an applicant may not be considered a qualified
6 applicant or participate in the program unless the applicant
7 contracts for the following terms with the Commonwealth
8 through the agency:

9 (i) The applicant must be employed in the mental
10 health field focusing on early childhood through
11 adolescence for a period of no less than one year.

12 (ii) The applicant permits the agency to determine
13 compliance with the work requirement and all other terms
14 or requirements deemed necessary by the agency to perform
15 its obligations under this article.

16 (iii) Upon the applicant's death or total and
17 permanent disability, the agency nullifies the service
18 obligation of the applicant.

19 (iv) If the applicant is convicted of or pleads
20 guilty or no contest to a felony, the agency may
21 terminate the applicant's service in the program and
22 demand repayment of the amount of the financial award as
23 of the date of the conviction.

24 (v) If the applicant fails to begin or complete the
25 obligations contracted for, the applicant shall pay to
26 the agency the amount of the financial award received
27 under the terms of the contract.

28 (vi) Providing false information or
29 misrepresentation on the application or verification of
30 service shall be deemed a default under the contract.

1 (vii) The agency shall determine the time of the
2 default.

3 (8) A recipient shall certify annually to the agency
4 that the recipient continues to meet the qualifications for
5 participation in the program for each year that the recipient
6 continues to participate in the program.

7 (d) Limitation.--The agency may not approve a financial
8 award under this article for a tuition loan that is in default
9 at the time of application.

10 Section 2203-C. Tuition payment awards.

11 (a) Employment.--The agency shall make a tuition payment
12 award under this article to a recipient who:

13 (1) works in and has received a satisfactory rating from
14 an employer in the mental health field focusing on early
15 childhood through adolescence; or

16 (2) has been hired by an employer in the mental health
17 field focusing on early childhood through adolescence.

18 (b) Documentation.--A recipient shall submit documentation
19 of eligibility as the agency may require, including
20 documentation to indicate employment and grades received while a
21 student at one of the universities that is part of the State
22 System of Higher Education. The documentation shall be presented
23 to the agency in the form of a letter from the recipient's
24 employer stating that the recipient:

25 (1) is employed by an employer in the mental health
26 field focusing on early childhood through adolescence; and

27 (2) performs duties in a satisfactory manner.

28 Section 2204-C. Tax applicability.

29 A financial award payment under the program shall not be
30 considered taxable income for the purposes of Article III of the

1 act of March 4, 1971 (P.L.6, No.2), known as the Tax Reform Code
2 of 1971.

3 Section 2205-C. Student financial aid.

4 This article shall be subject to 22 Pa. Code Ch. 121
5 (relating to student financial aid).

6 Section 2206-C. Agency duties.

7 The agency shall administer the program and shall adopt
8 regulations, policies, procedures and forms as are necessary to
9 implement the program, which are not inconsistent with the
10 provisions of this article.

11 Section 2207-C. Appropriation.

12 The sum of \$50,000,000 is appropriated from the General Fund
13 to the agency for the purpose of making tuition payment awards
14 to recipients under this article. In the event that funding is
15 insufficient to fully fund all eligible applicants, tuition
16 payment awards shall be made to recipients on a first-come,
17 first-served basis until funding has been exhausted.

18 Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.