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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 2604 Session of  
2024

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INTRODUCED BY TAKAC, ORTITAY, McNEILL, PROBST, SANCHEZ,  
HANBIDGE, OLSOMMER, SCHLOSSBERG, KHAN, HILL-EVANS, DELLOSO,  
BOYD, D. WILLIAMS, CURRY, CEPEDA-FREYTIZ, DALEY AND GREEN,  
SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

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AN ACT

1 Establishing the Emerging Psychologists Workforce Initiative  
2 Program; and providing for authorization of internship  
3 positions, for award of internship positions and for funding  
4 of program.

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

7 Section 1. Short title.

8 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Emerging  
9 Psychologists Workforce Initiative Act.

10 Section 2. Definitions.

11 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall  
12 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
13 context clearly indicates otherwise:

14 "Application." An application to participate in the program  
15 submitted under section 3(c).

16 "Commitment stipend." Money provided under the program to a  
17 qualified applicant who enters into a contract with the  
18 department under section 3(d)(1).

1 "Department." The Department of Health of the Commonwealth.  
2 "Mental health professional shortage area or facility." Any  
3 of the following:

4 (1) An area in this Commonwealth that has been certified  
5 by the department as having a shortage of mental health  
6 professionals based on either of the following:

7 (i) The designation of the area's geographic  
8 location by the Bureau of Health Workforce under the  
9 United States Health Resources and Services  
10 Administration as having a shortage of mental health  
11 professionals.

12 (ii) The department's determination that the area  
13 has a critical shortage of psychologists.

14 (2) A facility in this Commonwealth that has been  
15 certified by the department as having a shortage of mental  
16 health professionals based on either of the following:

17 (i) The designation of the facility by the Bureau of  
18 Health Workforce under the United States Health Resources  
19 and Services Administration as having a shortage of  
20 mental health professionals.

21 (ii) The department's determination that the  
22 facility has a critical shortage of psychologists.

23 "Program." The Emerging Psychologists Workforce Initiative  
24 Program established under section 3(a).

25 "Qualified applicant." An individual who meets all of the  
26 criteria under section 3(b).

27 "Recipient." A qualified applicant who receives a commitment  
28 stipend.

29 Section 3. Emerging Psychologists Workforce Initiative.

30 (a) Establishment.--The Emerging Psychologists Workforce

1 Initiative Program is established within the department. The  
2 department shall administer the program to provide commitment  
3 stipends to qualified applicants who continue to practice  
4 psychology in mental health professional shortage areas or  
5 facilities. The department may consult with the Department of  
6 Human Services to administer the program.

7 (b) Qualifications.--To participate in the program, the  
8 individual:

9 (1) shall be a resident of this Commonwealth;

10 (2) shall be a graduate of an accredited college or  
11 university holding a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
12 psychology, Doctor of Psychology or Doctor of Education in  
13 psychology or a doctoral degree in a field related to  
14 psychology;

15 (3) may not have previously completed the equivalent of  
16 12 months or 1,750 hours of a doctoral internship program or  
17 position accredited by the American Psychological Association  
18 or Canadian Psychological Association; and

19 (4) shall submit an application to the department.

20 (c) Application.--The department shall establish a process  
21 by which a qualified applicant may apply for and receive an  
22 internship position in accordance with this act. An application  
23 shall be submitted to the department on a form and in a manner  
24 as determined by the department.

25 (d) Stipends.--

26 (1) A qualified applicant shall be eligible to receive a  
27 commitment stipend if the qualified applicant enters into a  
28 contract with the department to serve in a mental health  
29 professional shortage area or facility for a period of not  
30 less than 12 months upon the completion of an internship

1 position under section 4 and in accordance with section 5. A  
2 recipient shall be provided with a commitment stipend in an  
3 amount as determined by the department based on the amount  
4 appropriated by the General Assembly for the duration of the  
5 internship position.

6 (2) A qualified applicant may not receive a commitment  
7 stipend under paragraph (1) for more than 12 months while  
8 participating in the program.

9 (3) The department shall determine the method of  
10 commitment stipend distribution, including the frequency of  
11 payments.

12 Section 4. Authorization of internship positions.

13 Subject to the availability of money for the program, the  
14 department shall authorize internship positions located within  
15 mental health professional shortage areas or facilities to  
16 participate in the program in accordance with the following:

17 (1) The department shall ensure that the internship  
18 positions are equally distributed across rural and urban  
19 areas of this Commonwealth to the greatest extent possible.

20 (2) The department shall ensure that internship  
21 positions provide qualified applicants with comprehensive  
22 clinical training, supervision and instructional experiences  
23 that prepare qualified applicants with the necessary  
24 competencies to enter into the health care workforce.

25 (3) The department shall prioritize authorizing  
26 internship positions in facilities that provide Medicaid  
27 covered mental health services and are accredited by the  
28 American Psychological Association.

29 (4) The department shall ensure that each internship  
30 position satisfies the requirements for supervised experience

1 necessary to obtain a licensure to practice psychology in  
2 accordance with the act of March 23, 1972 (P.L.136, No.52),  
3 known as the Professional Psychologists Practice Act, and may  
4 consult with the State Board of Psychology to fulfill the  
5 requirement under this paragraph.

6 Section 5. Award of internship positions.

7 (a) Obligations of recipient.--A qualified applicant who  
8 receives a commitment stipend shall enter into a contract with  
9 the department that requires the recipient, upon the successful  
10 completion of an internship position, to be employed as a  
11 psychologist in a designated mental health professional shortage  
12 area or facility for a period of not less than 12 months. The  
13 recipient shall have the following duties:

14 (1) To permit the department to determine compliance  
15 with the employment requirements and all other terms of the  
16 contract.

17 (2) To apply for a license to practice psychology in  
18 accordance with the act of March 23, 1972 (P.L.136, No.52),  
19 known as the Professional Psychologists Practice Act, within  
20 45 days of completing the internship position.

21 (3) Within six months of obtaining a license to practice  
22 psychology under the Professional Psychologists Practice Act,  
23 to be employed as a psychologist serving in a mental health  
24 professional shortage area or facility. The department may  
25 exempt a recipient from the employment deadline under this  
26 paragraph in accordance with the policies and procedures  
27 adopted by the department as necessary to implement the  
28 program under section 7.

29 (b) Failure to comply.--A recipient who fails to comply with  
30 the requirements under subsection (a), or who fails to complete

1 the internship position according to the terms of the contract,  
2 shall reimburse the department for the amount of the commitment  
3 stipend. Money collected by the department from reimbursements  
4 under this subsection shall be used exclusively to provide  
5 commitment stipends and may not be used for any other purpose.

6 Section 6. Funding of program.

7 The department shall award commitment stipends to recipients  
8 to the extent that money is available to administer the program.

9 Section 7. Regulations.

10 The department shall promulgate regulations, adopt policies  
11 and procedures and establish forms as necessary to implement  
12 this act.

13 Section 8. Effective date.

14 This act shall take effect in 90 days.