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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 2824 Session of  
1998

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INTRODUCED BY DALEY, COLAIZZO, MICHLOVIC, WALKO, LAUGHLIN,  
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YOUNGBLOOD AND THOMAS, SEPTEMBER 30, 1998

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,  
SEPTEMBER 30, 1998

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AN ACT

1 Establishing the Higher Education Lodestar Partnership for  
2 Economic Revitalization (HELPER) program in the Department of  
3 Community and Economic Development; providing for the  
4 operation and administration of the HELPER program; and  
5 making an appropriation.

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

8 Section 1. Short title.

9 This act shall be known and may be cited as the HELPER Act.

10 Section 2. Declaration of policy.

11 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

12 (1) The economically distressed areas of this  
13 Commonwealth often labor under multiple disadvantages in  
14 economic recovery efforts, including the out-migration of  
15 community leadership, that makes sustained economic recovery  
16 planning very difficult. Many businesses and individuals in  
17 these areas struggle simply to survive and frequently have  
18 little energy or time left over for long-range planning.

1           (2) To assist these communities and the entrepreneurs of  
2       this Commonwealth in identifying and realizing the economic  
3       opportunities that exist in these distressed areas, this act  
4       establishes the Higher Education Lodestar Partnership for  
5       Economic Revitalization (HELPER) program.

6   Section 3. Definitions.

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

10      "Department." The Department of Community and Economic  
11      Development of the Commonwealth.

12      "Eligible graduate student." A student enrolled on at least  
13      a half-time basis in a program of study leading to an advanced  
14      degree who will have earned at least 24 credit hours in  
15      residence toward a degree prior to actual participation in the  
16      Higher Education Lodestar Partnership for Economic  
17      Revitalization program established in section 4 and whose  
18      educational institution has been nominated to participate in  
19      Higher Education Lodestar Partnership for Economic  
20      Revitalization.

21      "Eligible institution." An accredited degree-granting  
22      educational institution approved by the Commonwealth to offer  
23      degrees for advanced study beyond the baccalaureate level.

24      "Exported." In addition to the physical export of a salable  
25      product, includes any other activity that is a net income  
26      generator for a distressed region, including, but not limited  
27      to, tourism and increased health services to an indigenous  
28      elderly population covered by insurance programs.

29      "HELPER." Higher Education Lodestar Partnership for Economic  
30      Revitalization.

1 "HELPER project" or "project." The three-year team study of  
2 an economically distressed area undertaken or to be undertaken  
3 by an eligible institution selected by the Department of  
4 Community and Economic Development.

5 "Lodestar." A star that is used as a point of reference,  
6 such as Polaris, the North Star and guiding principle, interest  
7 or ambition.

8 "Nominated graduate student." An eligible graduate student  
9 who has been named by the student's institution as a candidate  
10 to participate in a Higher Education Lodestar Partnership for  
11 Economic Revitalization project.

12 "Nominated institution." An eligible institution which has  
13 received tentative approval from the Department of Community and  
14 Economic Development for a specific Higher Education Lodestar  
15 Partnership for Economic Revitalization site and has been  
16 invited to assemble a study team from among its students and  
17 faculty.

18 "Regular and direct participation." More than ten hours per  
19 week, including preparation time.

20 "Selected team member." A nominated graduate student who has  
21 been selected by the Department of Community and Economic  
22 Development to participate as a member of a Higher Education  
23 Lodestar Partnership for Economic Revitalization team and who  
24 commits to team participation for a minimum of one year.

25 "Small business." A sole proprietorship that has fewer than  
26 50 full-time equivalent employees.

27 Section 4. HELPER program established.

28 (a) Establishment.--There is established a program within  
29 the department to be known as the Higher Education Lodestar  
30 Partnership for Economic Revitalization (HELPER) program.

1 (b) Applications.--The department shall solicit and accept  
2 applications at least once every three years from eligible  
3 institutions to participate in the HELPER program. Each  
4 applicant shall identify a faculty member who will serve as the  
5 institution's team coordinator for the three-year study period.  
6 The team coordinator shall contribute the number of hours  
7 equivalent to a half-time faculty position to the HELPER  
8 project. The applicant shall identify an additional array of  
9 faculty members whose combined commitment to the project shall  
10 equal no less than another half-time faculty position.

11 (c) Team coordinator.--The regular educational workload of a  
12 team coordinator shall reflect the half-time commitment to the  
13 HELPER project. During the three-year period of the team study,  
14 the team coordinator shall maintain no other substantial  
15 employment or business interest, other than investments,  
16 requiring the coordinator's regular and direct participation.

17 (d) Other faculty members.--There shall be no fewer than  
18 three faculty members, including the team coordinator, committed  
19 to participation on a HELPER project from each applicant  
20 institution.

21 (e) Number of teams.--The department shall seek to create a  
22 total of eight teams of ten students each. For administrative  
23 convenience, four teams may be started in the first year of the  
24 program and four teams in the second year.

25 (f) Notice of study sites and deadline for applications.--No  
26 later than the announcement of the solicitation for applications  
27 from eligible institutions, the department shall issue a list of  
28 economically distressed areas as potential study sites for  
29 HELPER teams. The deadline for applications after the initial  
30 request for proposals shall be six months.

1 Section 5. Review of applications and selection by department.

2 (a) Matching institutions with sites.--An applicant  
3 institution shall evaluate the list of eligible sites provided  
4 by the department and, in its application, identify the site or  
5 sites for which the institution could provide strong economic  
6 development planning services based on the matrix of  
7 institutional programs of study and potential resources in the  
8 various HELPER sites. Upon consultation with a potential  
9 awardee, the department may award a study site to an applicant  
10 which is not addressed in its applications, based on the sole  
11 judgment of the department on the variety of applicants,  
12 suitability and institutional strengths.

13 (b) Approval of institutions.--The department shall grant  
14 tentative approval to selected eligible institutions prior to  
15 making a final determination on team awards. The institution  
16 shall then assemble a study team from among its students and  
17 faculty. Final approval of the institution's application shall  
18 be granted after a team acceptable to the department has been  
19 assembled. The department, using regular news media outlets,  
20 shall publicize the basis for the final decisions on team  
21 awards.

22 (c) Evaluation criteria.--In evaluating the institutional  
23 HELPER applications, the department shall give reasonable weight  
24 to the strength of academic programs in each institution, the  
25 ability of its graduate students and the proximity of the  
26 institution to the HELPER site. Proximity, however, shall not be  
27 a controlling consideration.

28 (d) Selection of graduate students.--Eligible graduate  
29 students shall be selected by the department after the nominated  
30 institution names at least two eligible graduate students for

1 departmental consideration for each team slot. Nominated  
2 institutions may nominate their graduate student candidates by  
3 any process approved internally by the university or college  
4 administration.

5 (e) Interview with department official.--Nominated graduate  
6 students shall not be selected for team participation by the  
7 department without a personal interview with the department  
8 official in charge of team selection. All nominated students  
9 shall be afforded an interview.

#### 10 Section 6. HELPER program description.

11 (a) Work plan.--The methods chosen by each team to  
12 accomplish the three phases of the HELPER project set forth in  
13 this section shall be described in a work plan prior to  
14 beginning each phase. The work plan shall be submitted to the  
15 department. The department may respond to the work plan with  
16 suggestions or questions, which the team shall answer. The final  
17 decision on work plan and method shall remain with the team.

18 (b) Team assembly.--Teams shall be assembled by nominated  
19 institutions with a view to bringing to bear the best academic  
20 talent that the institution has within its strongest, relevant  
21 programs which may include, but are not limited to, the areas of  
22 physical or biological sciences, business management and  
23 marketing. Team members may be offered one-year or multi-year  
24 membership on a team as determined by institutional policy.

25 (c) Phase I.--In Phase I of the HELPER program for a  
26 specific site, the HELPER team assigned to the distressed area  
27 shall identify in substantial detail the existing natural,  
28 institutional, cultural and human resources that may lend  
29 themselves to the development of products or services that can  
30 be exported from the distressed region. This examination shall

1 specifically include an inventory of past industries and income  
2 generators for the local economy over at least the preceding 100  
3 years. This inventory shall be shared with local residents to  
4 solicit comment on the items included and to point out possible  
5 additions. A Phase I report shall be compiled and printed in  
6 draft form.

7 (d) Phase II.--In Phase II, the team shall evaluate the  
8 viability of each of the resources or ideas identified in Phase  
9 I, including all historical industries and income generators.  
10 Those that are rejected as not feasible shall be accompanied by  
11 a rigorous, detailed analysis of the relevant regional, national  
12 and international markets. A Phase II report shall be compiled  
13 and printed in draft form.

14 (e) Phase III.--In Phase III, the team shall develop  
15 detailed strategies for pursuing the best chance opportunities  
16 identified in Phase II and shall begin marketing those  
17 opportunities to the appropriate regional and national  
18 investment communities outside the distressed area as well as  
19 providing access to those opportunities for the residents of the  
20 distressed area. Team strategies shall focus, in general, on  
21 small business opportunities inasmuch as these are the most  
22 likely to actually occur. A report shall be drafted in the final  
23 quarter of the last year of the project summarizing the key  
24 elements of the draft reports for Phases I and II and setting  
25 forth the status of activities during the third year. The final  
26 report shall be printed and disseminated to:

27 (1) The department.

28 (2) The majority and minority chairs of the Community  
29 and Economic Development Committee of the Senate and the  
30 Commerce and Economic Development Committee of the House of

1 Representatives.

2 (3) County commissioners, municipal officials and State  
3 legislators serving the distressed area.

4 (4) Local libraries.

5 (5) Economic development entities within the distressed  
6 area.

7 (6) Persons and institutions external to the distressed  
8 area that may provide access, in the department's judgment,  
9 to potential investors in the plans developed.

10 (f) Marketing efforts.--The department shall publicize the  
11 availability of plans and opportunities identified in the final  
12 report through its various marketing efforts on behalf of the  
13 Commonwealth, including Internet communications.

14 Section 7. Costs and stipends.

15 (a) Team member stipends.--Each selected team member shall  
16 receive a stipend of \$12,000 annually, paid by the institution  
17 in monthly increments. The Pennsylvania Higher Education  
18 Assistance Agency shall not treat this stipend as income  
19 calculating eligibility for financial assistance of any kind.  
20 Team members shall work on the HELPER project at least 20 hours  
21 every week for 48 weeks of the program year. They shall be  
22 afforded sick leave benefits in accord with applicable  
23 university or college policy.

24 (b) Employment limited.--A selected team member may have no  
25 regular and direct participation in any other employment or  
26 business, other than coursework, during the period of team  
27 membership. A team member may enroll for no more than 15  
28 semester hours of credit.

29 (c) Early withdrawal.--Early withdrawal from the team,  
30 unless at the request of the sponsoring institution, shall



1 convert the stipend paid and received by a selected team member  
2 into a ten-year educational loan repayable at no interest to the  
3 Commonwealth.

4 (d) Grant to institution.--Each sponsoring institution shall  
5 receive a grant of 25% of the total stipends paid to team  
6 members each year from which it shall pay necessary employer  
7 taxes and team overhead. The sponsoring institution shall be  
8 responsible for providing secretarial support, office space,  
9 telephone and computer equipment and services and supplies for  
10 the team and travel, meals and lodging expenses for the team's  
11 faculty members. An allowance of 10% of the total stipend grant  
12 shall be available as a vouchered account for travel, meals and  
13 lodging expenses of the student team members.

14 Section 8. Initial implementation.

15 The department shall implement the HELPER program so that the  
16 first study teams shall begin their work no later than May 1,  
17 1999.

18 Section 9. Regulations.

19 The department is authorized to adopt regulations necessary  
20 to implement and administer the HELPER program.

21 Section 10. Appropriation.

22 The sum of \$1,500,000, or as much thereof as may be  
23 necessary, is hereby appropriated to the Department of Community  
24 and Economic Development for the fiscal year July 1, 1998, to  
25 June 30, 1999, to carry out the provisions of this act.

26 Section 11. Severability.

27 The provisions of this act are severable. If any provision of  
28 this act or its application to any person or circumstance is  
29 held invalid, the invalidity shall not affect other provisions  
30 or applications of this act which can be given effect without

- 1 the invalid provision or application.
- 2 Section 12. Effective date.
- 3 This act shall take effect immediately.