

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 79

Session of
2009

INTRODUCED BY GREENLEAF, ERICKSON, STOUT, TOMLINSON, PIPPY,
ORIE, WILLIAMS, FERLO, BROWNE, RAFFERTY, COSTA, KASUNIC,
WAUGH, O'PAKE, KITCHEN, WONDERLING, LOGAN, WOZNIAK, ALLOWAY
AND BOSCOLA, MARCH 5, 2009

REFERRED TO EDUCATION, MARCH 5, 2009

AN ACT

1 Establishing the Volunteer Emergency Service Personnel
2 Educational Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program.

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

5 Section 1. Short title.

6 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Volunteer
7 Emergency Service Personnel Educational Assistance and Loan
8 Forgiveness Act.

9 Section 2. Definitions.

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

13 "Agency." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance
14 Agency.

15 "Applicant." An active member of a volunteer fire company,
16 emergency service team or rescue team.

17 "Approved institution of higher learning." An educational

1 institution offering a postsecondary program of education,
2 including vocational schools located in this Commonwealth and
3 approved by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

4 "Approved program of education." A degree-granting or
5 certificate-granting curriculum or course of study pursued at an
6 approved institution of higher learning on a full-time or part-
7 time basis or its equivalent as determined by the Pennsylvania
8 Higher Education Assistance Agency.

9 "Full-time student." A student enrolled in an approved
10 institution of higher learning pursuing an approved program of
11 education equal to or greater than 12 credit hours or its
12 equivalent recognized by the Pennsylvania Higher Education
13 Assistance Agency as a full-time course of study.

14 "Part-time student." A student enrolled in an approved
15 institution of higher learning pursuing an approved program of
16 education of less than 15 credit hours or its equivalent
17 recognized by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance
18 Agency as a part-time course of study.

19 "Program." The Volunteer Emergency Service Personnel
20 Educational Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program established
21 in section 3.

22 Section 3. Educational Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program.

23 The Volunteer Emergency Service Personnel Educational
24 Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program is established to
25 provide grants to applicants or allow applicants to receive
26 payments by the agency for debt incurred as a result of student
27 loans entered into for the purpose of pursuing programs of
28 education. Applicants shall be entered in the program upon
29 receipt of their first grant or loan forgiveness payment and
30 shall remain in the program for a period not exceeding five

1 academic years.

2 Section 4. Educational assistance eligibility.

3 An applicant shall be eligible to receive educational
4 assistance under this act if the applicant meets all of the
5 following eligibility criteria:

6 (1) The applicant is a qualified resident of this
7 Commonwealth.

8 (2) The applicant has been an active member, as
9 determined by the State Fire Commissioner, of a volunteer
10 fire company, emergency service team or rescue team for a
11 period of at least one year in this Commonwealth.

12 (3) The applicant has enrolled as a student in an
13 approved program of education at an approved institution of
14 higher learning.

15 (4) The applicant provides the approved institution of
16 higher learning with a sworn or official statement of fact by
17 the State Fire Commissioner, president or commissioner of a
18 volunteer fire department of which the applicant is a
19 volunteer, attesting that the applicant is a member in good
20 standing of the volunteer fire company, emergency service
21 team or rescue team.

22 Section 5. Grants.

23 (a) Provision.--From the funds specifically appropriated for
24 the purposes of this act, grants shall be provided to eligible
25 members for the purpose of pursuing approved programs of
26 education.

27 (b) Promissory notes.--At the receipt of the grant, an
28 eligible member shall sign a promissory note to repay the full
29 amount of the grant. The promissory note shall be conditional
30 upon termination of active membership status with a volunteer

1 fire company, emergency service team or rescue team in this
2 Commonwealth.

3 Section 6. Amount of grants.

4 (a) Part-time student assistance grants.--A grant awarded
5 pursuant to this act to a part-time student applicant shall be
6 determined by the agency and shall not exceed for each academic
7 year the amount of one-half the tuition of the part-time course
8 of study in which the part-time student applicant is enrolled.

9 (b) Full-time student assistance grants.--Grants awarded
10 pursuant to this act to full-time student applicants shall be
11 determined by the agency and shall not exceed \$3,700 per
12 academic year or the actual amount of the applicant's tuition
13 for the academic year, whichever is less.

14 (c) Other grants.--The agency shall not reduce the amount of
15 other agency grants or aid for which an applicant qualifies on
16 account of the applicant's eligibility for or receipt of grants
17 under this act.

18 Section 7. Loan forgiveness eligibility.

19 An applicant shall be eligible to receive loan forgiveness
20 payments under this act if the applicant meets all of the
21 following eligibility criteria:

22 (1) The applicant is a qualified resident of this
23 Commonwealth.

24 (2) The applicant has been an active member, as
25 determined by the State Fire Commissioner, of a volunteer
26 fire company, emergency service team or rescue team for a
27 period of at least one year in this Commonwealth.

28 (3) The applicant has enrolled as a student in an
29 approved program of education at an approved institution of
30 higher learning.

1 (4) The applicant provides the approved institution of
2 higher learning with a sworn or official statement of fact by
3 the State Fire Commissioner, president or commissioner of a
4 volunteer fire department of which the applicant is a
5 volunteer, attesting that the applicant is a member in good
6 standing of the volunteer fire company, emergency service
7 team or rescue team.

8 Section 8. Payments.

9 (a) General rule.--An applicant is eligible for payment by
10 the agency of a portion of the debt incurred by the applicant
11 through agency-administered guaranteed student loan programs for
12 the education necessary to successfully complete a particular
13 course of study.

14 (b) Amounts to be forgiven.--For each year that an applicant
15 is a member of a volunteer fire company, emergency service team
16 or rescue team, the agency may forgive a proportional part of
17 the applicant's loan so that the loan may be entirely forgiven
18 over a maximum period of five years in which the applicant is
19 attending an approved institution of higher learning.

20 (c) Maximum amounts.--No more than \$2,000 shall be forgiven
21 in any year, and no more than \$10,000 shall be forgiven for an
22 applicant over a five-year period.

23 (d) Procedure.--Payments shall be made in accordance with
24 procedures established by the agency. A loan forgiveness payment
25 shall not be made for a loan that is in default at the time of
26 application.

27 Section 9. Limitations.

28 (a) Time.--No eligible member shall receive assistance
29 grants or loan forgiveness payments under this act for a total
30 of more than five academic years or their equivalent as

1 determined by the agency.

2 (b) Active membership status.--No grant payments or loan
3 forgiveness payments shall be made under this act except during
4 the eligible member's term of service as an active member of a
5 volunteer fire company, emergency service team or rescue team.

6 Section 10. Administration.

7 The General Assembly shall appropriate funds for educational
8 assistance grants and loan forgiveness payments under this act.

9 A portion of the funds appropriated may be used to pay the costs
10 of the administration of this act.

11 Section 11. Effective date.

12 This act shall take effect in 60 days.