
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 540 Session of
2005

INTRODUCED BY GREENLEAF, MUSTO, ORIE, EARLL, O'PAKE, LEMMOND,
COSTA, LOGAN, ERICKSON, BOSCOLA, RAFFERTY, PUNT AND KITCHEN,
MARCH 30, 2005

REFERRED TO EDUCATION, MARCH 30, 2005

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 (relating to Educational Assistance and Loan
22 Forgiveness Program).

23 Section 3. Educational Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program.

24 The Volunteer Emergency Service Personnel Educational
25 Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program is established to
26 provide grants to applicants or allow applicants to receive
27 payments by the agency for debt incurred as a result of student
28 loans entered into for the purpose of pursuing programs of
29 education. Applicants shall be entered in the program upon
30 receipt of their first grant or loan forgiveness payment and

1 shall remain in the program for a period not exceeding five
2 academic years.

3 Section 4. Educational assistance eligibility.

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

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

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

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

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

23 Section 5. Grants.

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

28 (b) Promissory notes.--At the receipt of the grant, an
29 eligible member shall sign a promissory note to repay the full
30 amount of the grant. The promissory note shall be conditional

1 upon termination of active membership status with a volunteer
2 fire company, emergency service team or rescue team in this
3 Commonwealth.

4 Section 6. Amount of grants.

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

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

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

19 Section 7. Loan forgiveness eligibility.

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

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

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

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

1 higher learning.

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

9 Section 8. Payments.

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

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

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

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

28 Section 9. Limitations.

29 (a) Time.--No eligible member shall receive assistance
30 grants or loan forgiveness payments under this act for a total

1 of more than five academic years or their equivalent as
2 determined by the agency.

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

7 Section 10. Administration.

8 The General Assembly shall appropriate funds for educational
9 assistance grants and loan forgiveness payments under this act.
10 A portion of the funds appropriated may be used to pay the costs
11 of the administration of this act.

12 Section 11. Effective date.

13 This act shall take effect in 60 days.