
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 1793 Session of
2001

INTRODUCED BY DALEY, SHANER, JOSEPHS, TRAVAGLIO, ROONEY,
LaGROTTA, CAPPELLI, HENNESSEY, GEORGE, BELARDI, ROBINSON,
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YOUNGBLOOD, BELFANTI, YUDICHAK, HARHAI, FRANKEL, WALKO,
McCALL, LAUGHLIN, DIVEN, COSTA, GRUCELA, DeWEESE, CAWLEY,
WANSACZ, BROWNE, BUTKOVITZ, PALLONE, THOMAS, STEELMAN AND
J. WILLIAMS, JUNE 19, 2001

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
JUNE 19, 2001

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

1 these areas struggle simply to survive and frequently have
2 little energy or time left over for long-range planning.

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

8 Section 3. Definitions.

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

12 "Department." The Department of Community and Economic
13 Development of the Commonwealth.

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

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

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

1 "HELPER." Higher Education Lodestar Partnership for Economic
2 Revitalization.

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

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

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

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

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

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

27 "Small business." A sole proprietorship that has fewer than
28 50 full-time equivalent employees.

29 Section 4. HELPER program established.

30 (a) Establishment.--There is established a program within

1 the department to be known as the Higher Education Lodestar
2 Partnership for Economic Revitalization (HELPER) program.

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

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

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

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

27 (f) Notice of study sites and deadline for applications.--No
28 later than the announcement of the solicitation for applications
29 from eligible institutions, the department shall issue a list of
30 economically distressed areas as potential study sites for

1 HELPER teams. The deadline for applications after the initial
2 request for proposals shall be six months.

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

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

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

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

30 (d) Selection of graduate students.--Eligible graduate

1 students shall be selected by the department after the nominated
2 institution names at least two eligible graduate students for
3 departmental consideration for each team slot. Nominated
4 institutions may nominate their graduate student candidates by
5 any process approved internally by the university or college
6 administration.

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

12 Section 6. HELPER program description.

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

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

27 (c) Phase I.--In Phase I of the HELPER program for a
28 specific site, the HELPER team assigned to the distressed area
29 shall identify in substantial detail the existing natural,
30 institutional, cultural and human resources that may lend

1 themselves to the development of products or services that can
2 be exported from the distressed region. This examination shall
3 specifically include an inventory of past industries and income
4 generators for the local economy over at least the preceding 100
5 years. This inventory shall be shared with local residents to
6 solicit comment on the items included and to point out possible
7 additions. A Phase I report shall be compiled and printed in
8 draft form.

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

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

29 (1) The department.

30 (2) The majority and minority chairs of the Community

1 and Economic Development Committee of the Senate and the
2 Commerce and Economic Development Committee of the House of
3 Representatives.

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

6 (4) Local libraries.

7 (5) Economic development entities within the distressed
8 area.

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

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

16 Section 7. Costs and stipends.

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

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

1 (c) Early withdrawal.--Early withdrawal from the team,
2 unless at the request of the sponsoring institution, shall
3 convert the stipend paid and received by a selected team member
4 into a ten-year educational loan repayable at no interest to the
5 Commonwealth.

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

16 Section 8. Initial implementation.

17 The department shall implement the HELPER program so that the
18 first study teams shall begin their work no later than November
19 1, 2001.

20 Section 9. Regulations.

21 The department is authorized to adopt regulations necessary
22 to implement and administer the HELPER program.

23 Section 10. Appropriation.

24 The sum of \$1,500,000, or as much thereof as may be
25 necessary, is hereby appropriated to the Department of Community
26 and Economic Development for the fiscal year July 1, 2001, to
27 June 30, 2002, to carry out the provisions of this act.

28 Section 11. Severability.

29 The provisions of this act are severable. If any provision of
30 this act or its application to any person or circumstance is

1 held invalid, the invalidity shall not affect other provisions
2 or applications of this act which can be given effect without
3 the invalid provision or application.

4 Section 12. Effective date.

5 This act shall take effect immediately.