

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 153 Session of
2007

INTRODUCED BY GREENLEAF, RHOADES, TOMLINSON, O'PAKE, WAUGH,
COSTA, KASUNIC, STOUT, ERICKSON, WASHINGTON, WOZNIAK, GORDNER
AND BROWNE, MARCH 6, 2007

REFERRED TO EDUCATION, MARCH 6, 2007

AN ACT

1 Establishing the Child Welfare Workers Loan Forgiveness Program
2 for Commonwealth residents who graduate from institutions of
3 higher education and who apply their degrees to careers in
4 child welfare work.

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 Child Welfare
9 Workers Loan Forgiveness Act.

10 Section 2. Declaration of purpose.

11 The primary purpose of a child welfare loan forgiveness
12 program is to attract capable and promising students to the
13 child welfare profession and to increase employment and
14 retention of individuals who are working towards or who have
15 received either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree in
16 social work, psychology or sociology.

17 Section 3. Definitions.

18 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall

1 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
2 context clearly indicates otherwise:

3 "Certified child welfare employer." An agency certified by
4 the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency as employing
5 child welfare workers as provided for under section 4(c).

6 "Child welfare worker." A staff person who holds a
7 bachelor's, master's or doctorate degree in the field of social
8 work, psychology or sociology and is employed by a public or
9 private agency serving dependent children or those children who
10 have been referred for child welfare services and who works in
11 any of the following functional areas: family preservation,
12 family support, children's protective services, including on-
13 call, investigative assessment and case planning and case
14 management, and foster care and adoption, including placement of
15 children, recruitment of families, licensing and adoption
16 assessment.

17 "PHEAA." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance
18 Agency.

19 "Program." The Child Welfare Workers Loan Forgiveness
20 Program established under section 4.

21 "Qualified applicant." A person who meets all of the
22 following criteria:

23 (1) Is a resident of this Commonwealth.

24 (2) Has successfully completed a bachelor's, master's or
25 doctorate degree in the field of social work, psychology or
26 sociology at an accredited institution of higher education.

27 (3) Has been hired as a full-time employee of a
28 certified child welfare employer.

29 (4) Has borrowed through and has a current outstanding
30 balance on a Federal Stafford, Graduate PLUS or Consolidation

1 Loan Programs administered by the Pennsylvania Higher
2 Education Assistance Agency.

3 Section 4. Child Welfare Workers Loan Forgiveness Program.

4 (a) Establishment.--The Child Welfare Workers Loan
5 Forgiveness Program is hereby established. PHEAA shall
6 administer the program.

7 (b) Nature of program.--For each year that a qualified
8 applicant is employed by a certified child welfare employer,
9 PHEAA may forgive a proportional part of the applicant's student
10 loan so that the loan may be partially or entirely forgiven.

11 (c) Employer eligibility.--Eligible certified child welfare
12 employers for purposes of the program shall include county
13 children and youth agencies charged with enforcing 23 Pa.C.S.
14 Ch. 63 (relating to child protective services) and private
15 providers who serve youth who have been adjudicated dependent or
16 delinquent and other entities as determined by PHEAA.

17 (d) Limitations.--

18 (1) For qualified applicants with an undergraduate
19 degree, no more than \$2,500 shall be forgiven in any one
20 year, and no more than \$10,000 shall be forgiven for any one
21 qualified applicant.

22 (2) For qualified applicants with both an undergraduate
23 degree and either a master's or doctorate degree, no more
24 than \$5,000 shall be forgiven in any one year, and no more
25 than \$20,000 shall be forgiven for any one qualified
26 applicant.

27 (3) PHEAA shall establish procedures for making payments
28 to qualified applicants.

29 (4) No qualified applicant may receive a larger amount
30 of forgiveness than the outstanding balance the applicant has

1 with the Guaranteed Stafford or Consolidation Loan Programs
2 administered by PHEAA.

3 (e) Eligibility.--A qualified applicant shall be eligible
4 for loan forgiveness regardless of whether the applicant's
5 outstanding loan balance is acquired before or after the date of
6 the effective date of this section and no loan forgiveness shall
7 be given for years of service before the date of this section.

8 Section 5. Qualifications for loan forgiveness awards.

9 (a) Application.--PHEAA shall establish procedures for
10 qualified applicants to apply and be approved for participation
11 in the program.

12 (b) Employment.--Recipients of loan forgiveness awards must
13 be full-time employees of a certified child welfare employer who
14 maintain satisfactory employment with the organization and agree
15 to continue employment with a certified child welfare employer
16 for a least three years after the end of their participation in
17 the program.

18 (c) Documentation.--PHEAA may require qualified applicants
19 who are participating in the program to submit documentation in
20 order to maintain continued eligibility for the program.

21 Section 6. Funding.

22 Loan forgiveness awards under this act may be made to the
23 extent that funds are appropriated by the General Assembly or
24 available from other sources and are sufficient to cover the
25 administration of the program. In the event that funding is
26 insufficient to fully fund administration and all eligible
27 applicants, priority shall be given to renewal applicants.
28 Thereafter, PHEAA shall utilize a random lottery system for
29 determining which applicants receive loan forgiveness awards.

30 Section 7. Tax applicability.

1 Loan forgiveness repayments shall not be considered taxable
2 income for purposes of Article III of the act of March 4, 1971
3 (P.L.6, No.2), known as the Tax Reform Code of 1971.

4 Section 8. Annual report.

5 (a) Development of report.--PHEAA shall publish a report by
6 October 1, 2008, and every year thereafter for the immediately
7 preceding fiscal year. The report shall provide information
8 regarding the operation of the program, including:

9 (1) The number and amount of child welfare worker loan
10 forgiveness grants issued and renewed for qualified
11 applicants.

12 (2) The number and type of enforcement actions taken by
13 the agency.

14 (b) Submission.--The annual report shall be submitted to the
15 Governor, the chair and minority chair of the Appropriations
16 Committee of the Senate, the chair and minority chair of the
17 Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives, the
18 chair and minority chair of the Education Committee of the
19 Senate, the chair and minority chair of the Education Committee
20 of the House of Representatives, the chair and minority chair of
21 the Public Health and Welfare Committee of the Senate and the
22 chair and minority chair of the Health and Human Services
23 Committee of the House of Representatives.

24 Section 9. Responsibility of PHEAA.

25 PHEAA shall administer the program and shall adopt such
26 regulations, policies, procedures and forms as are necessary and
27 not inconsistent with the provisions of this act.

28 Section 10. Effective date.

29 This act shall take effect in 60 days.