

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; and prescribing powers and duties of the
5 Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

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 Child Welfare
10 Workers Loan Forgiveness Act.

11 Section 2. Declaration of purpose.

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

18 Section 3. Definitions.

19 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:

7 (1) holds a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree in
8 the field of social work, psychology or sociology;

9 (2) is employed by a public or private agency serving
10 dependent children or those children who have been referred
11 for child welfare services; and

12 (3) works in any of the following functional areas:

13 (i) family preservation;

14 (ii) family support;

15 (iii) children's protective services, including on-
16 call, investigative assessment and case planning and case
17 management; and

18 (iv) foster care and adoption, including placement
19 of children, recruitment of families, licensing and
20 adoption assessment.

21 "PHEAA." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance
22 Agency.

23 "Program." The Child Welfare Workers Loan Forgiveness
24 Program established under this act.

25 "Qualified applicant." A person who meets all of the
26 following criteria:

27 (1) Is a resident of this Commonwealth.

28 (2) Has successfully completed a bachelor's, master's or
29 doctoral degree in the field of social work, psychology or
30 sociology at an accredited institution of higher education.

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

3 (4) Has borrowed through and has a current outstanding
4 balance on a Federal Stafford, Graduate PLUS or Consolidation
5 Loan Programs administered by the Pennsylvania Higher
6 Education Assistance Agency.

7 Section 4. Child Welfare Workers Loan Forgiveness Program.

8 (a) Establishment.--The Child Welfare Workers Loan
9 Forgiveness Program is established in PHEAA. PHEAA shall
10 administer the program.

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

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

21 (d) Limitations.--

22 (1) For qualified applicants with an undergraduate
23 degree, no more than \$2,500 shall be forgiven in any one year
24 and no more than \$10,000 shall be forgiven for any one
25 qualified applicant.

26 (2) For qualified applicants with both an undergraduate
27 degree and either a master's or doctoral degree, no more than
28 \$5,000 shall be forgiven in any one year and no more than
29 \$20,000 shall be forgiven for any one qualified applicant.

30 (3) PHEAA shall establish procedures for making payments

1 to qualified applicants.

2 (4) No qualified applicant may receive a larger amount
3 of forgiveness than the outstanding balance the applicant has
4 with the Guaranteed Stafford or Consolidation Loan Programs
5 administered by PHEAA.

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

12 Section 5. Qualifications for loan forgiveness awards.

13 (a) Application.--PHEAA shall establish procedures for
14 qualified applicants to apply and be approved for participation
15 in the program.

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

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

25 Section 6. Funding.

26 Loan forgiveness awards under this act may be made to the
27 extent that funds are appropriated by the General Assembly or
28 available from other sources and are sufficient to cover the
29 administration of the program. In the event that funding is
30 insufficient to fully fund administration and all eligible

1 applicants, priority shall be given to renewal applicants.
2 Thereafter, PHEAA shall utilize a random lottery system for
3 determining which applicants receive loan forgiveness awards.

4 Section 7. Tax applicability.

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

8 Section 8. Annual report.

9 (a) Development of report.--PHEAA shall publish a report by
10 October 1, 2019, and every year thereafter for the immediately
11 preceding fiscal year. The report shall provide information
12 regarding the operation of the program, including:

13 (1) The number and amount of child welfare worker loan
14 forgiveness grants issued and renewed for qualified
15 applicants.

16 (2) The number and type of enforcement actions taken by
17 the agency.

18 (b) Submission.--The annual report shall be submitted to the
19 Governor, the chairperson and minority chairperson of the
20 Appropriations Committee of the Senate, the chairperson and
21 minority chairperson of the Appropriations Committee of the
22 House of Representatives, the chairperson and minority
23 chairperson of the Education Committee of the Senate, the
24 chairperson and minority chairperson of the Education Committee
25 of the House of Representatives, the chairperson and minority
26 chairperson of the Health and Human Services Committee of the
27 Senate and the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Human
28 Services Committee of the House of Representatives.

29 Section 9. Responsibility of PHEAA.

30 PHEAA shall administer the program and shall adopt such

1 regulations, policies, procedures and forms as are necessary and
2 not inconsistent with the provisions of this act.

3 Section 10. Effective date.

4 This act shall take effect in 60 days.