AN ACT

Amending Title 35 (Health and Safety) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in incentives for municipal volunteers of fire companies and nonprofit emergency medical services agencies, establishing the First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program; and making editorial changes.

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

Section 1. Subchapter D heading of Chapter 79A of Title 35 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes is amended to read:

SUBCHAPTER D

[MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS] PENALTIES

Section 2. Chapter 79A of Title 35 is amended by adding a subchapter to read:

SUBCHAPTER E

FIRST RESPONDER LOAN FORGIVENESS

Sec.

79A41. Definitions.
79A42. First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program.
§ 79A41. Definitions.

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

"Active first responder." A member of an emergency medical services agency or a member of a volunteer fire company or volunteer rescue company.


"Approved institution of higher learning." A degree-granting or certificate-granting educational institution, including a vocational school, that:

(1) offers a postsecondary program of education;

(2) is located in this Commonwealth; and

(3) is approved by the agency.

"Approved program of education." A curriculum or course of study pursued at an approved institution of higher learning as determined by the agency.

"Emergency medical services agency." An emergency medical service corporation, association or organization which meets all of the following:

(1) Is located in this Commonwealth.

(2) Is licensed by the Department of Health.
Is regularly engaged in the provision of emergency medical services, including basic life support or advanced life support services and advanced life support squads as defined in 28 Pa. Code § 1027.1 (relating to general provisions) and licensed quick response services.

"Program." The First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program established in section 79A42 (relating to First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program).

"Qualified applicant." An active first responder who qualifies for loan forgiveness under section 79A43 (relating to award of loan forgiveness).

"Volunteer fire company." A nonprofit chartered corporation, association or organization located in this Commonwealth which provides fire protection or rescue services and which may offer other voluntary emergency services within this Commonwealth. Voluntary emergency services provided by a volunteer fire company may include voluntary ambulance and voluntary rescue services.

"Volunteer rescue company." A nonprofit chartered corporation, association or organization located in this Commonwealth that provides emergency rescue services.

§ 79A42. First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program.

(a) Program established.--The First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program is established. The program shall provide loan forgiveness awards to qualified applicants in accordance with this subchapter. The agency shall administer the program for active first responders on a Statewide basis.

(b) Applicants.--An active first responder who meets the following criteria may apply to the agency for loan forgiveness under the program:
(1) Is a resident of this Commonwealth.

(2) Has been an active first responder, as certified in accordance with section 79A48 (relating to certification), for a period of at least one year in this Commonwealth.

(3) Has enrolled as a student in an approved program of education.

(4) Provides the approved institution of higher learning with a sworn or official statement by the Office of the State Fire Commissioner or the chief or president of the emergency medical services agency, attesting that the applicant is a member in good standing of the emergency medical services agency, volunteer fire company or volunteer rescue company.

§ 79A43. Award of loan forgiveness.

The agency may provide loan forgiveness for an active first responder who, in the first year as an active first responder following completion of a postsecondary degree or certification program and, in each subsequent year, meets all of the following criteria:

(1) Is a recipient of an agency-administered, federally insured student loan.

(2) Has completed a certificate or degree program at an approved institution of higher learning. The certificate or degree program must be an approved program of education.

(3) Is certified as an active first responder, by the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services or the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, for four consecutive years preceding the date of application.

(4) Executes a sworn affidavit, under penalty of perjury, that the individual does not have a delinquent payment owing to any Commonwealth agency.
§ 79A44. Amount of awards.

(a) Loan forgiveness.--Agency-administered, federally insured student loans for an approved program of education provided to a qualified applicant may be forgiven by the agency as follows:

(1) The agency may forgive a qualified applicant's loan in an amount up to $16,000.

(2) Payment of the award shall be made in accordance with the procedures established by the agency.

(3) A qualified applicant may receive loan forgiveness awards as follows:

(i) First year of active first responder status following graduation in an amount up to $4,000, but not exceeding 25% of the original qualifying loans.

(ii) Second year of active first responder status following graduation in an amount up to $4,000, but not exceeding 25% of the original qualifying loans.

(iii) Third year of active first responder status following graduation in an amount up to $8,000, but not exceeding 50% of the original qualifying loans.

(b) Preference.--The agency may give preference in approving loan forgiveness awards under the program to renewal applications.

§ 79A45. Funding.

The agency may approve loan forgiveness awards only to the extent that funds are appropriated by the General Assembly and are sufficient to cover administration of the program. In the event that funding is insufficient to fully fund administration and awards to all qualified applicants, the agency shall prorate loan forgiveness awards.
§ 79A46. Administration.

The agency shall promulgate regulations and adopt policies, procedures and forms as are necessary and not inconsistent with the provisions of this subchapter.

§ 79A47. Point system.

(a) General rule.--A point system establishing the requirements for annual certification of active first responders shall be developed and implemented by the chief or president of:

(1) a volunteer fire company;

(2) a volunteer rescue company; and

(3) an emergency medical services agency.

(b) Factors.--The point system shall be used to determine whether to certify an individual as an active first responder and shall include the following factors:

(1) The number of emergency calls to which the individual responded.

(2) The individual's level of training and participation in formal training.

(3) Time spent by the individual on administration and support activities, including maintenance of facilities and equipment.

(4) Involvement by the individual in other projects that directly benefit the organization's financial viability, emergency response or operational readiness.

§ 79A48. Certification.

(a) Application.--An applicant for certification as an active first responder must submit a signed application to the chief or president of the volunteer fire company, volunteer rescue company or emergency medical services agency that the applicant serves.
(b) Local sign-off.--The chief or president of the volunteer fire company or volunteer rescue company and another officer of the volunteer fire company or volunteer rescue company, or the chief or president of the emergency medical services agency and another officer of the emergency medical services agency, shall:

(1) Sign the application attesting to the individual's status as an active first responder.

(2) Forward the application to the Office of the State Fire Commissioner or the Department of Health for final review and processing.

§ 79A49. Guidelines.

The agency shall adopt guidelines, including forms, necessary to administer this subchapter.

Section 3. This act shall take effect in 60 days.