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.
§ 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.
(3) 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. AS DEFINED <--
IN SECTION 8103 (RELATING TO DEFINITIONS).
"FIRE COMPANY." A VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY.

"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. AS DEFINED IN SECTION 7802 (RELATING TO DEFINITIONS). <--

"Volunteer rescue company." A nonprofit chartered <--
corporation, association or organization located in this
Commonwealth that provides emergency rescue services. AS DEFINED <--
IN SECTION 7802.
§ 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 MUST MEET the following criteria may TO apply to the agency for loan forgiveness under the program THIS SUBCHAPTER:

(1) Is a resident of this Commonwealth.

(2) Has been an active first responder, as certified in accordance with section 79A46 79A47 (relating to certification), for a period of at least one year in this Commonwealth.

(3) Has enrolled ENROLLED as a student in an approved program of education AND COMPLETED A POSTSECONDARY DEGREE OR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM.

(4) Provides the approved institution of higher learning AGENCY with a sworn or official statement by the Office of the State Fire Commissioner CHIEF OF THE FIRE COMPANY 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.

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(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, CHIEF OR PRESIDENT OF THE EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES OR CHIEF OF THE FIRE COMPANY, 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 § 79A46. 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 OR DRILLS.

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

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

§ 79A48 § 79A47. 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 AGENCY for final review and processing.

§ 79A49. Guidelines. § 79A48. REGULATIONS.
The agency shall PROMULGATE REGULATIONS AND ESTABLISH RULES OR adopt guidelines, including forms, necessary to administer this subchapter.

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