

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 1036

Session of
1995

INTRODUCED BY PETRONE, WALKO, GAMBLE, VAN HORNE, GIGLIOTTI,
TRELLO, ITKIN, READSHAW, LEVDANSKY, MICHLOVIC, JAMES AND
WASHINGTON, MARCH 6, 1995

AS RE-REPORTED FROM COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES, AS AMENDED, JANUARY 29, 1996

AN ACT

1 Providing for Commonwealth support for a Mental Health and
2 Mental Retardation Staff Member Loan Forgiveness Program for
3 Commonwealth residents who graduate from institutions of
4 higher education and who apply their degrees to careers as
5 mental health and mental retardation staff members in this
6 Commonwealth.

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

9 Section 1. Short title.

10 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Mental Health
11 and Mental Retardation Staff Member Loan Forgiveness Program
12 Act.

13 Section 2. Findings and declaration of purpose.

14 The General Assembly finds and declares that:

15 (1) The number of college students planning to enter the
16 mental health and mental retardation profession appears to be
17 inadequate to meet the need for staff members in this
18 Commonwealth.

19 (2) Demand from industry and other opportunities attract

1 ~~existing and~~ potential staff members away from the <—
2 profession.

3 (3) The pool of qualified staff members has diminished.

4 (4) Payment of a portion of student loans for mental
5 health and mental retardation staff members serves the
6 important public purpose of encouraging new staff members to
7 continue their careers in this Commonwealth.

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 "Agency." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance
13 Agency.

14 "Qualified applicant." A person who meets all of the
15 following criteria:

16 (1) ~~The person has~~ HAS been hired as a full-time staff <—
17 member by a county mental health or mental retardation
18 service agency through a merit or civil service system
19 approved by the Secretary of Public Welfare or by a private
20 provider that is under contract with a county to provide
21 mental health or mental retardation services, ~~and earns no~~ <—
22 ~~more than \$35,000 per annum.~~

23 (2) ~~The person has~~ HAS successfully completed both <—
24 county and civil service probationary periods or, in the case
25 of a contracted private provider, has successfully completed
26 the provider's established probationary period.

27 (3) ~~The person is~~ IS performing staff duties at a county <—
28 mental health or mental retardation service agency or at a
29 private provider that is under contract with a county to
30 provide mental health or mental retardation services.

1 (4) ~~The person has~~ HAS borrowed through an agency- <—
2 administered loan program.

3 ~~"Secretary." The Secretary of Public Welfare of the~~ <—
4 ~~Commonwealth.~~

5 (5) EARNS NO MORE THAN \$35,000 PER ANNUM. <—

6 (6) IS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT AS A
7 STAFF MEMBER OR HAS BEEN PREVIOUSLY ENROLLED IN THE PROGRAM.

8 "Staff member." A caseworker, direct caregiver, therapist,
9 program coordinator or director.

10 Section 4. Mental Health and Mental Retardation Staff Member
11 Loan Forgiveness Program.

12 A qualified applicant who is selected for the Mental Health
13 and Mental Retardation Staff Member Loan Forgiveness Program in
14 accordance with this act shall be eligible for payment by the
15 agency of a portion of the debt incurred by the applicant
16 through an agency-administered loan program for the education
17 necessary to be ~~certified as~~ a mental health or mental <—

18 retardation staff member in this Commonwealth. ~~For each year~~ <—
19 ~~that the applicant is a full time mental health or mental~~
20 ~~retardation staff member in an approved county mental health or~~
21 ~~mental retardation department or a private provider under~~

22 ~~contract to a county,~~ the THE agency may forgive a proportional <—
23 part of the applicant's loan so that the loan may be entirely
24 forgiven over four years of full-time staff work. No more than
25 \$2,500 shall be forgiven in any year, and no more than \$10,000
26 shall be forgiven for any applicant. Payments shall be made in
27 accordance with the procedures established by the agency.

28 Section 5. Loan forgiveness awards.

29 Recipients of the loan forgiveness awards shall be those
30 mental health and mental retardation staff members who are

1 ~~certified by the secretary~~ WORKING IN and who have received a <—
2 satisfactory rating ~~by the~~ FROM EITHER A county office of mental <—
3 health or mental retardation service or a private provider under
4 contract to a county. Each mental health or mental retardation
5 staff member shall be required to submit such documentation of
6 continued eligibility as the agency may require.

7 Section 6. Funding.

8 Loan forgiveness awards may be made to the extent that funds
9 are appropriated by the General Assembly AND ARE SUFFICIENT TO <—
10 COVER THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM. IN THE EVENT THAT
11 FUNDING IS INSUFFICIENT TO FULLY FUND ADMINISTRATION AND ALL
12 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS, THE AGENCY SHALL UTILIZE A RANDOM LOTTERY
13 SYSTEM FOR DETERMINING WHICH APPLICANTS RECEIVE LOAN FORGIVENESS
14 AWARDS.

15 Section 7. Responsibility of agency.

16 It shall be the responsibility of the agency to administer
17 the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Staff Worker Loan
18 Forgiveness Program established by this act and to adopt such
19 regulations, policies, procedures and forms as are necessary and
20 not inconsistent with the provisions of this act.

21 ~~Section 8. Retroactivity.~~ <—

22 ~~Loan forgiveness under this act may be based on mental health~~
23 ~~and mental retardation staff work performed prior to the~~
24 ~~effective date of this act.~~

25 Section 9 8. Effective date. <—

26 This act shall take effect in 60 days.