

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 315 Session of
2005

INTRODUCED BY STACK, RAFFERTY, TOMLINSON, STOUT, COSTA, LAVALLE,
KITCHEN, PUNT, O'PAKE, RHOADES, KASUNIC, LOGAN, BOSCOLA,
M. WHITE, FERLO AND C. WILLIAMS, FEBRUARY 16, 2005

REFERRED TO EDUCATION, FEBRUARY 16, 2005

AN ACT

1 Providing for Commonwealth support for an Alcohol and Drug
2 Addiction Counselor Loan Forgiveness Program for Commonwealth
3 residents who graduate from institutions of higher education
4 and apply their education to careers as alcohol and other
5 drug addiction counselors in this Commonwealth.

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 Alcohol and
10 Drug Addiction Counselor Loan Forgiveness Program.

11 Section 2. Legislative declaration and findings.

12 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

13 (1) Alcohol and other drug abuse and addiction is our
14 nation's number one health problem.

15 (2) Alcohol and other drug abuse and addiction affect
16 one in four to five families in this Commonwealth.

17 (3) Alcohol and other drug addiction-related accidents,
18 injuries and illnesses are responsible for 20% of the dollars
19 spent on hospital care through Medicaid and over 33% of

expenditures through insurance and other health plans.

(4) Alcohol and other drug addiction is involved in over 70% of crime in this Commonwealth.

(5) Treatment of alcohol and other drug addiction is a crucial investment in our health care, in the stability of our families and in protecting the public safety.

(6) It is in the interest of the Commonwealth to provide for the ongoing professional development of alcohol and drug addiction counselors who provide this treatment.

(7) Payment of a portion of student loans for addiction counselors serves the important public purpose of encouraging and assisting new addiction counselors to enter the field and to encourage others to continue careers in this vitally important area of health care in this Commonwealth.

Section 3. Definitions.

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

"Agency." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

"Licensed facility." A treatment facility licensed by the Department of Health to provide addiction treatment services.

"Program." The Alcohol and Drug Addiction Counselor Loan Forgiveness Program established by this act.

"Qualified applicant." A person who meets the following criteria:

(1) a person who has been hired and is employed as a counselor assistant, counselor or clinical supervisor by a drug and alcohol addiction treatment facility licensed by the Department of Health for that purpose;

1 (2) who has successfully completed the treatment
2 facility's probationary period of employment and remains in
3 good standing with the facility or subsequent facilities
4 licensed by the Department of Health to provide treatment for
5 alcohol and other drug addictions; and

6 (3) who is performing counseling at a facility licensed
7 by the Department of Health to provide treatment for
8 addiction to alcohol and other drugs.

9 Section 4. Alcohol and Drug Addiction Counselor Loan

10 Forgiveness.

11 (a) Establishment.--The Alcohol and Drug Addiction Counselor
12 Loan Forgiveness Program is hereby established. The program
13 shall be administered by the agency.

14 (b) Nature of program.--For each year that a qualified
15 applicant is employed as a counselor or case worker in a
16 facility licensed by the Department of Health to provide
17 treatment for alcohol and other drug addiction, the agency may
18 forgive a proportional part of the applicant's loan so that the
19 loan may be partially or entirely forgiven over a four-year
20 period of employment.

21 (c) Limitations.--No more than \$5,000 shall be forgiven in
22 any year and no more than \$20,000 shall be forgiven for any one
23 applicant. Payments shall be made according to procedures
24 established by the agency.

25 Section 5. Qualifications for loan forgiveness awards.

26 (a) Employment.--Recipients of loan forgiveness awards shall
27 be those workers and counselors who maintain satisfactory
28 employment with a licensed treatment facility for alcohol and
29 drug addictions and who agree to continue employment in
30 addiction counseling in this Commonwealth for at least three

1 years after the end of their participation in the program.

2 (b) Documentation.--Each counselor supervisor, counselor or
3 counselor trainee shall be required to submit documentation of
4 continued eligibility as the agency may require.

5 (c) Preference.--Applicants who are residents of this
6 Commonwealth and who are working in addiction treatment
7 facilities serving people and families with addictions who are
8 dependent on public funding to obtain treatment shall be given
9 priority in the application process.

10 Section 6. Funding.

11 Loan forgiveness awards may be made to the extent that funds
12 are appropriated by the General Assembly for this purpose.

13 Section 7. Regulations.

14 The agency shall adopt regulations, policies and procedures
15 as are necessary to carry out the provisions of this act.

16 Section 8. Effective date.

17 This act shall take effect in 60 days.