

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 1371 Session of 2011

INTRODUCED BY WATSON, SCHRODER, GEIST, BOYD, BARRAR, CAUSER, CLYMER, COHEN, J. EVANS, FLECK, GINGRICH, GOODMAN, GROVE, HEFFLEY, HENNESSEY, HUTCHINSON, KILLION, METZGAR, MICOZZIE, MILLER, MURT, PYLE, QUINN, RAPP, SIMMONS, TALLMAN, J. TAYLOR, TOBASH, VULAKOVICH, WAGNER AND BEAR, APRIL 25, 2011

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, APRIL 25, 2011

AN ACT

1 Establishing the Volunteer First Responder Loan Forgiveness
2 Program; and providing for the powers and duties of the
3 Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, the State
4 Fire Commissioner and the Director of the Emergency Medical
5 Services Office in the Department of Health.

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 Volunteer
10 First Responder Loan Forgiveness Act.

11 Section 2. Definitions.

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

15 "Active volunteer first responder" or "active volunteer." A
16 volunteer for a volunteer ambulance service, volunteer fire
17 company or volunteer rescue company certified as meeting the
18 criteria of this act as set forth under section 7.

1 "Agency." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance
2 Agency.

3 "Commissioner." The State Fire Commissioner appointed under
4 section 3 of the act of November 13, 1995 (P.L.604, No.61),
5 known as the State Fire Commissioner Act.

6 "Director." The director of the Bureau of Emergency Medical
7 Services in the Department of Health.

8 "Program." The Volunteer First Responder Loan Forgiveness
9 Program.

10 "Qualified active volunteer first responder applicant." A
11 person who, in that person's first year of active volunteer
12 service following completion of a postsecondary degree or
13 certification program and, in each subsequent year, meets all of
14 the following criteria:

15 (1) Has graduated from a postsecondary institution in
16 this Commonwealth.

17 (2) Is certified by the Office of the State Fire
18 Commissioner.

19 (3) Executes a sworn affidavit, under penalty of
20 perjury, that the person does not have a delinquent payment
21 owing to any Commonwealth agency.

22 (4) Is currently an active volunteer or becomes an
23 active volunteer subsequent to the effective date of this
24 section.

25 "Volunteer organization." A volunteer ambulance service,
26 volunteer fire company and volunteer rescue company as defined
27 under section 102 of the act of July 31, 2003 (P.L.73, No.17),
28 known as the Volunteer Fire Company and Volunteer Ambulance
29 Service Grant Act.

30 Section 3. Volunteer First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program.

(a) Establishment.--The Volunteer First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program is established.

(b) Active volunteer first responder loans.--Qualified active volunteer first responder applicants who are selected for the loan forgiveness awards under the program in accordance with this act shall be eligible for payment by the agency of a portion of a loan under the agency administered Federal Family Education Loan Program, including a Stafford or Consolidation loan, provided that the loan is for the education of the volunteer first responder and is owned, serviced or guaranteed by the agency.

Section 4. Loan forgiveness awards.

(a) Qualifications.--A recipient of a loan forgiveness award must be an active volunteer first responder who is certified by the commissioner or director. The active volunteer must submit such documentation of continued eligibility as the agency may require.

(b) Amount of awards.--

(1) If the applicant is a current active volunteer and certified as such by the commissioner or director for four consecutive years, the agency may forgive the active volunteer applicant's loan of 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 volunteer status following graduation in an amount up to \$4,000, but not exceeding 25% of the original qualifying loans.

(ii) Second year of volunteer status following

graduation in an amount up to \$4,000, but not exceeding 25% of the original qualifying loans.

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

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

Section 5. 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.

Section 6. Administration.

The agency shall administer the program and shall adopt such regulations, policies, procedures and forms as are necessary and not inconsistent with the provisions of this act.

Section 7. Point system.

(a) General rule.--The commissioner and the director shall jointly develop and implement a point system establishing the annual requirements for certification of active volunteers.

(b) Factors.--To determine whether to certify an individual as an active volunteer, the point system shall consider 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 and drills.

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

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

7 Section 8. Certification.

8 (a) Self-certification.--The active volunteer must sign and
9 submit the application to the chief of the volunteer fire
10 company or the president of the volunteer ambulance service or
11 volunteer rescue company that the active volunteer serves.

12 (b) Local sign-off.--The chief and another officer of the
13 volunteer fire company, the president and another officer of the
14 volunteer ambulance service or rescue company shall:

15 (1) Sign the application attesting to the individual's
16 status as an active volunteer.

17 (2) Forward the application to the department for final
18 review and processing.

19 Section 9. Guidelines.

20 The agency shall adopt guidelines, including forms, necessary
21 to administer this act.

22 Section 10. Effective date.

23 This act shall take effect in 60 days.