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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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SENATE BILL

No. 72 Session of  
2017

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INTRODUCED BY GREENLEAF, VULAKOVICH, BAKER, ARGALL, SCHWANK,  
BREWSTER, SCARNATI, RESCHENTHALER, COSTA, WARD, YUDICHAK,  
YAW, HUTCHINSON, WHITE, RAFFERTY, STEFANO AND BOSCOLA,  
JANUARY 12, 2017

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REFERRED TO EDUCATION, JANUARY 12, 2017

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AN ACT

1 Establishing the Volunteer Emergency Service Personnel  
2 Educational Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program; and  
3 prescribing powers and duties of the Pennsylvania Higher  
4 Education Assistance Agency.

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

7 Section 1. Short title.

8 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Volunteer  
9 Emergency Service Personnel Educational Assistance and Loan  
10 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 "Agency." The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance  
16 Agency.

17 "Applicant." An active member of a volunteer fire company,  
18 emergency service team or rescue team.

1 "Approved institution of higher learning." An educational  
2 institution offering a postsecondary program of education,  
3 including vocational schools located in this Commonwealth and  
4 approved by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

5 "Approved program of education." A degree-granting or  
6 certificate-granting curriculum or course of study pursued at an  
7 approved institution of higher learning on a full-time or part-  
8 time basis or its equivalent as determined by the Pennsylvania  
9 Higher Education Assistance Agency.

10 "Full-time student." A student enrolled in an approved  
11 institution of higher learning pursuing an approved program of  
12 education equal to or greater than 12 credit hours or its  
13 equivalent recognized by the Pennsylvania Higher Education  
14 Assistance Agency as a full-time course of study.

15 "Part-time student." A student enrolled in an approved  
16 institution of higher learning pursuing an approved program of  
17 education of less than 12 credit hours or its equivalent  
18 recognized by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance  
19 Agency as a part-time course of study.

20 "Program." The Volunteer Emergency Service Personnel  
21 Educational Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program established  
22 in section 3.

23 Section 3. Educational Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program.

24 The Volunteer Emergency Service Personnel Educational  
25 Assistance and Loan Forgiveness Program is established in the  
26 agency to provide grants to applicants or allow applicants to  
27 receive payments by the agency for debt incurred as a result of  
28 student loans entered into for the purpose of pursuing programs  
29 of education. Applicants shall be entered in the program upon  
30 receipt of their first grant or loan forgiveness payment and

1 shall remain in the program for a period not exceeding five  
2 academic years.

3 Section 4. Educational assistance eligibility.

4 An applicant shall be eligible to receive educational  
5 assistance under this act if the applicant meets all of the  
6 following eligibility criteria:

7 (1) The applicant is a qualified resident of this  
8 Commonwealth.

9 (2) The applicant has been an active member, as  
10 determined by the State Fire Commissioner, of a volunteer  
11 fire company, emergency service team or rescue team for a  
12 period of at least one year in this Commonwealth.

13 (3) The applicant has enrolled as a student in an  
14 approved program of education at an approved institution of  
15 higher learning.

16 (4) The applicant provides the approved institution of  
17 higher learning with a sworn or official statement of fact by  
18 the State Fire Commissioner, president or commissioner of a  
19 volunteer fire department of which the applicant is a  
20 volunteer, attesting that the applicant is a member in good  
21 standing of the volunteer fire company, emergency service  
22 team or rescue team.

23 Section 5. Grants.

24 (a) Provision.--From the funds specifically appropriated for  
25 the purposes of this act, grants shall be provided by the agency  
26 to eligible members for the purpose of pursuing approved  
27 programs of education.

28 (b) Promissory notes.--At the receipt of the grant, an  
29 eligible member shall sign a promissory note to repay the full  
30 amount of the grant. The promissory note shall be conditional

1 upon termination of active membership status with a volunteer  
2 fire company, emergency service team or rescue team in this  
3 Commonwealth.

4 Section 6. Amount of grants.

5 (a) Part-time student assistance grants.--A grant awarded  
6 pursuant to this act to a part-time student applicant shall be  
7 determined by the agency and shall not exceed for each academic  
8 year the amount of one-half the tuition of the part-time course  
9 of study in which the part-time student applicant is enrolled.

10 (b) Full-time student assistance grants.--Grants awarded  
11 pursuant to this act to full-time student applicants shall be  
12 determined by the agency and shall not exceed \$3,700 per  
13 academic year or the actual amount of the applicant's tuition  
14 for the academic year, whichever is less.

15 (c) Other grants.--The agency shall not reduce the amount of  
16 other agency grants or aid for which an applicant qualifies on  
17 account of the applicant's eligibility for or receipt of grants  
18 under this act.

19 Section 7. Loan forgiveness eligibility.

20 An applicant shall be eligible to receive loan forgiveness  
21 payments under this act if the applicant meets all of the  
22 following eligibility criteria:

23 (1) The applicant is a qualified resident of this  
24 Commonwealth.

25 (2) The applicant has been an active member, as  
26 determined by the State Fire Commissioner, of a volunteer  
27 fire company, emergency service team or rescue team for a  
28 period of at least one year in this Commonwealth.

29 (3) The applicant has enrolled as a student in an  
30 approved program of education at an approved institution of

1 higher learning.

2 (4) The applicant provides the approved institution of  
3 higher learning with a sworn or official statement of fact by  
4 the State Fire Commissioner, president or commissioner of a  
5 volunteer fire department of which the applicant is a  
6 volunteer, attesting that the applicant is a member in good  
7 standing of the volunteer fire company, emergency service  
8 team or rescue team.

9 Section 8. Payments.

10 (a) General rule.--An applicant is eligible for payment by  
11 the agency of a portion of the debt incurred by the applicant  
12 through agency-administered guaranteed student loan programs for  
13 the education necessary to successfully complete a particular  
14 course of study.

15 (b) Amounts to be forgiven.--For each year that an applicant  
16 is a member of a volunteer fire company, emergency service team  
17 or rescue team, the agency may forgive a proportional part of  
18 the applicant's loan so that the loan may be entirely forgiven  
19 over a maximum period of five years in which the applicant is  
20 attending an approved institution of higher learning.

21 (c) Maximum amounts.--No more than \$2,000 shall be forgiven  
22 in any year, and no more than \$10,000 shall be forgiven for an  
23 applicant over a five-year period.

24 (d) Procedure.--Payments shall be made in accordance with  
25 procedures established by the agency. A loan forgiveness payment  
26 shall not be made for a loan that is in default at the time of  
27 application.

28 Section 9. Limitations.

29 (a) Time.--No eligible member shall receive assistance  
30 grants or loan forgiveness payments under this act for a total

1 of more than five academic years or their equivalent as  
2 determined by the agency.

3 (b) Active membership status.--No grant payments or loan  
4 forgiveness payments shall be made under this act except during  
5 the eligible member's term of service as an active member of a  
6 volunteer fire company, emergency service team or rescue team.

7 Section 10. Administration.

8 The General Assembly shall appropriate funds for educational  
9 assistance grants and loan forgiveness payments under this act.  
10 A portion of the funds appropriated may be used to pay the costs  
11 of the administration of this act.

12 Section 11. Effective date.

13 This act shall take effect in 60 days.