

By Senator Polsky

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to solutions for mental health
3 professional shortages; creating s. 1009.675, F.S.;
4 defining terms; establishing a mental health
5 profession scholarship and loan forgiveness program
6 within the Department of Health for a specified
7 purpose; providing for applicant eligibility and the
8 award of scholarships; limiting the number of
9 scholarship awards that may be granted each year;
10 specifying service obligations for scholarship
11 recipients; providing for repayment of scholarship
12 funds if the program requirements are not fully
13 satisfied; providing for applicant eligibility and the
14 award of loan repayments; specifying conditions for
15 the award of such loan repayments; requiring the
16 department to review loan repayment applicant requests
17 on a quarterly basis and grant awards in a specified
18 manner; requiring the department to adopt rules;
19 providing that the program's implementation is
20 contingent on specific funding; providing an effective
21 date.

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23 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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25 Section 1. Section 1009.675, Florida Statutes, is created
26 to read:

27 1009.675 Scholarship and loan forgiveness program for
28 mental health professions.-

29 (1) As used in this section, the term:

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30 (a) "Approved program" means a graduate-level program in
31 psychology approved for licensure in this state under chapter
32 490 by the Board of Psychology or a graduate-level program in
33 clinical social work, marriage and family therapy, or mental
34 health counseling which has been approved for licensure in this
35 state under chapter 491 by the Board of Clinical Social Work,
36 Marriage and Family Therapy, and Mental Health Counseling.

37 (b) "Department" means the Department of Health.

38 (c) "Eligible health care facility" means a nursing home or
39 hospital; a state-operated medical or health care facility; a
40 public school; a county health department; a federally sponsored
41 community health center; colleges of clinical social work,
42 marriage and family therapy, mental health counseling, and
43 psychology in universities in this state; a family practice
44 teaching hospital as defined in s. 395.805; or a specialty
45 hospital for children as described in s. 409.9119.

46 (d) "Mental health profession" means the licensed practice
47 of clinical social work, marriage and family therapy, mental
48 health counseling, or psychology.

49 (e) "Mental health professional" means a person licensed in
50 this state to practice clinical social work, marriage and family
51 therapy, mental health counseling, or psychology.

52 (f) "Mental health professional shortage area" means a
53 geographic area designated as such by the department or the
54 Health Resources and Services Administration of the United
55 States Department of Health and Human Services.

56 (2) There is established within the department a mental
57 health profession scholarship and loan forgiveness program for
58 the purpose of attracting capable and promising students to

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59 mental health professions and encouraging qualified personnel to
60 seek employment in areas of this state suffering from critical
61 shortages of mental health professionals.

62 (3) (a) To be awarded a scholarship, an applicant must be
63 enrolled in an approved program that leads to a graduate degree
64 in a mental health profession.

65 (b) A scholarship may be awarded for up to 2 years for each
66 recipient, in an amount not to exceed \$8,000 per year. The
67 amount of the maximum scholarship award shall be adjusted
68 annually by the amount of increase or decrease in the Consumer
69 Price Index for All Urban Consumers published by the Bureau of
70 Labor Statistics of the United States Department of Labor. The
71 department may award up to 5,000 scholarships each year, subject
72 to availability of funds.

73 (c) Scholarship payments shall be transmitted to the
74 recipient upon receipt of documentation that the recipient is
75 enrolled in an approved mental health profession program in this
76 state. The department shall develop a formula to prorate
77 payments to scholarship recipients so as not to exceed the
78 maximum amount per academic year.

79 (d) Credit for repayment of a scholarship is as follows:

80 1. For each full year of scholarship assistance, the
81 recipient agrees to provide mental health services for 12 months
82 at an eligible health care facility in a mental health
83 professional shortage area of this state or work for 12 months
84 in a faculty position in a program in this state offering a
85 graduate degree in the recipient's field of study. For
86 scholarship recipients who attend school on a part-time basis,
87 their employment service obligation is prorated in proportion to

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88 the amount of scholarship payments received.

89 2. The recipient is encouraged to complete the service
90 obligation at a single employment site. If continuous employment
91 at the same site is not feasible, the recipient may apply to the
92 department for a transfer to another approved health care
93 facility.

94 3. Any recipient who does not complete an appropriate
95 program of studies, who does not become licensed as a mental
96 health professional in this state, who does not accept
97 employment as a mental health professional at an approved health
98 care facility, or who does not complete 12 months of approved
99 employment for each year of scholarship assistance received must
100 repay to the department, on a schedule to be determined by the
101 department, the entire amount of the scholarship plus 10 percent
102 interest accruing from the date of the scholarship payment.
103 Moneys repaid shall be used to fund scholarship and loan
104 repayment awards under the program. However, the department may
105 provide additional time for repayment if the department finds
106 that circumstances beyond the control of the recipient caused or
107 contributed to the default.

108 (4) (a) To receive an award of student loan repayment, an
109 applicant must have graduated from an approved program and have
110 received a license to practice a mental health profession in
111 this state.

112 (b) An applicant who received a scholarship under
113 subsection (3) is not eligible for loan repayment awards under
114 this subsection.

115 (c) Loan repayments may be awarded only for loans that were
116 used to pay the costs of tuition, books, and living expenses, at

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117 an amount not to exceed \$4,000 for each year of education toward
118 the degree obtained.

119 (d) From the funds available, the department may make loan
120 principal repayments of up to \$4,000 a year for up to 4 years on
121 behalf of selected graduates of an approved program. All
122 repayments are contingent upon continued proof of employment in
123 an eligible health care facility in this state and must be made
124 directly to the holder of the loan. The state bears no
125 responsibility for the collection of any interest charges or
126 other remaining balance. In the event that the designated
127 facilities are changed, a recipient continues to be eligible for
128 loan forgiveness as long as he or she continues to work in the
129 facility for which the original loan repayment was made and
130 otherwise meets all conditions of eligibility.

131 (e) The department shall review applicant requests on a
132 quarterly basis, and applicant awards must be based on the
133 following priority of employer until all funds are awarded:
134 state-operated medical and health care facilities; public
135 schools; county health departments; federally sponsored
136 community health centers; teaching hospitals as defined in s.
137 408.07; family practice teaching hospitals as defined in s.
138 395.805; specialty hospitals for children as used in s.
139 409.9119; and other hospitals, birth centers, and nursing homes.

140 (5) The department shall adopt rules, including rules to
141 address extraordinary circumstances that may cause a recipient
142 to default on either the school enrollment or employment
143 contractual agreement, to implement this section.

144 (6) This section shall be implemented only as specifically
145 funded.

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Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2023.