

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.

22
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, psychology, or school 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, psychology, or school
52 psychology.

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

57 (2) There is established within the department a mental
58 health profession scholarship and loan forgiveness program for

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59 the purpose of attracting capable and promising students to
60 mental health professions and encouraging qualified personnel to
61 seek employment in areas of this state suffering from critical
62 shortages of mental health professionals.

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

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

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

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

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

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88 their employment service obligation is prorated in proportion to
89 the amount of scholarship payments received.

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

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

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

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

116 (c) Loan repayments may be awarded only for loans that were

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117 used to pay the costs of tuition, books, and living expenses, at
118 an amount not to exceed \$4,000 for each year of education toward
119 the degree obtained.

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

132 (e) The department shall review applicant requests on a
133 quarterly basis, and applicant awards must be based on the
134 following priority of employer until all funds are awarded:
135 state-operated medical and health care facilities; public
136 schools; county health departments; federally sponsored
137 community health centers; teaching hospitals as defined in s.
138 408.07; family practice teaching hospitals as defined in s.
139 395.805; specialty hospitals for children as used in s.
140 409.9119; and other hospitals, birth centers, and nursing homes.

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

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

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146 funded.

147 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2024.