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**SENATE BILL 6259**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2018 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Ranker, Darneille, Palumbo, Keiser, McCoy, Liias, Kuderer, and Saldaña

AN ACT Relating to creating the social work professional loan repayment program; and adding a new chapter to Title 28B RCW.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  It is the intent of the legislature to incentivize social workers to enter into and continue in state service. Annual turnover is over twenty percent statewide for child welfare workers and over thirty percent in some regions. Repeated turnover has direct costs and indirect costs such as low morale, increased workloads, and the impact of relative inexperience on outcomes of safety, permanence and well-being. Consistent social worker assistance to families creates better outcomes and increases family reunification. The cost of achieving their professional credential requirements can result in a social worker having an educational debt burden greater than their annual salary. Over eighty percent of social workers have student debt and the pressure to pay this debt while caring for at-risk children in crisis can be a major barrier to retaining social workers. In addition, educational debt has been identified as a deterrent to students entering into public service careers.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter.

(1) "Eligible expenses" means reasonable expenses associated with the costs of acquiring an education such as tuition, books, equipment, fees, room and board, and other expenses determined by the office.

(2) "Forgiven," "to forgive," or "forgiveness" means to render social work services as a state of Washington employee.

(3) "Loan repayment" means a loan that is paid in full or in part if the participant renders social work services on behalf of the state of Washington.

(4) "Office" means the office of student financial assistance.

(5) "Participant" means a credentialed social work professional who has received a loan repayment award and commenced practice as a credentialed social worker.

(6) "Program" means the social work professional loan repayment program.

(7) "Required service obligation" means an obligation by the participant to provide social work services on behalf of the state of Washington department of social and health services children's administration or the state of Washington department of children, youth, and families for a period to be established as provided for in this chapter.

(8) "Satisfied" means paid in full.

(9) "Social worker" means a person who meets one of the following qualifications:

(a) Is licensed under RCW 18.225.090(1)(a); or

(b) Has graduated with at least a bachelor's degree from a social work educational program accredited by the council on social work education.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The social work professional loan repayment program is established for credentialed social work professionals. The program shall be administered by the office. In administering this program, the office shall:

(1) Verify credentialed social work professionals who are eligible to participate in the program;

(2) Adopt rules and develop guidelines to administer the program;

(3) Coordinate with the office of financial management state human resources division and the student achievement council to publicize the program, particularly to maximize participation among individuals in shortage areas and among populations expected to experience the greatest growth in the workforce; and

(4) Accept grants and donations from public and private sources for the program.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Social workers employed by the department of social and health services children's administration or department of children, youth, and families are eligible to participate in the program two years after commencing their employment as a social worker for either agency.

(2) Each participant is eligible for:

(a) Quarterly or more frequent payments, as determined by the office, subject to the best use of the funds and continued eligibility for the program; and

(b) A maximum lifetime award of fifty thousand dollars, for up to a maximum of ten consecutive years, until the loan is repaid.

(3) Repayment of loans under this program shall begin no later than ninety days after the individual has become a participant. Payments shall be made quarterly, or more frequently if deemed appropriate by the office, to the participant until:

(a) The loan is repaid;

(b) The participant becomes ineligible due to discontinued service as a social worker on behalf of the department of social and health services children's administration or department of children, youth, and families; or

(c) The award limits specified in subsection (2) of this section are reached.

(4) The payments in subsection (3) of this section will be for the full amount of the loans paid by the participant during the prior period.

(5) Should the participant discontinue service in a social work profession, payments against the participant's loans shall cease to be effective on the date the participant discontinues service.

(6) The office shall not be held responsible for any outstanding payments on principal or interest to any lenders once a participant's eligibility expires.

(7) Loans from federal government sources may be repaid by the program.

(8) Participants shall allow the office access to loan records and to acquire information from lenders necessary to verify eligibility and to determine payments.

(9) Loans may not be renegotiated with lenders to accelerate repayment.

(10) The office shall establish an appeal process by rule.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The office may grant loan repayment to eligible participants from the funds appropriated for this purpose or from any private or public funds given to the office for this purpose. Funds appropriated for the program, including reasonable administrative costs, may be used by the office for the purposes of loan repayments.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The social work professional loan repayment program fund is created in custody of the state treasurer. Any funds appropriated by the legislature for the social work professional loan repayment program or any other public or private funds intended for loan repayments under this program shall be placed in the program fund created by this section. All receipts from the program shall be deposited into the program fund. Only the office, or its designee, may authorize expenditures from the program fund. The program fund is subject to allotment procedures under chapter 43.88 RCW, but no appropriation is required for expenditures.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 1 through 6 of this act constitute a new chapter in Title 28B RCW.

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