

Pa. student loan forgiveness program for nurses to open up in January

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A one-time student loan forgiveness program will open up next year targeted to Pennsylvania licensed nurses to help address the state's nursing shortage. File/Dan Gleiter | dgleiter@pennlive.com

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Pennsylvania nurses who owe money on their student loans will see an opportunity for some debt relief opening up early next year.

Gov. Tom Wolf has directed the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, the state's student financial aid agency, to establish a one-time program to offer student loan relief to nurses. It is intended to help the state deal with its [nursing shortage](#) that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program will be funded with \$5 million of federal Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds intended to address emergent public health needs related to the pandemic.

It will be targeted to nurses who are licensed through the Pennsylvania Department of State and are state residents. They will have had to have worked as a school nurse or for a hospital or nursing facility, including home care agencies and assisted living residences, during the pandemic between March 2020 and December 2021. Their employment must have begun prior to the end of this year.

Eligible school nurses will be required to have worked at a preK-12 schools that provided in-person instruction where they were required to be physically present.

The program will provide eligible nurses with up to \$2,500 of loan forgiveness for each ensuing year of work, starting in March 2020, for a maximum of 3 years. The maximum benefit will be \$7,500 with payments made directly to their student loan servicer.

"The program is to be used as a recruitment and retention tool so that we have the workforce needed to continue to address pandemic results in the commonwealth," Elizabeth McCloud, PHEAA's vice president of state grant and special programs, told PHEAA's board on Thursday.

McCloud told board members the agency will work with the state departments of state and human services to frame the program and bring it to the board in November for authorization.

Rep. Jennifer O'Mara, D-Delaware County, asked McCloud if the eligibility criteria will stipulate how long a nurse has lived in the state and whether the program would apply to private student loans as well as federal loans. McCloud said those are the types of details that are still being worked on.

"Right now, we're pursuing an aggressive timeline to get information on the PHEAA's website alerting potential recipients and gathering their interest," McCloud said. "We're working toward opening an application window on January 1st."

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