

STATE OF NEW YORK

3656

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

January 30, 2021

Introduced by Sen. ORTT -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Finance

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to creating a volunteer firefighter scholarship program; and making an appropriation relating therefor

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. The education law is amended by adding a new section 669-i
2 to read as follows:

3 § 669-i. Volunteer firefighter scholarship program. 1. Eligibility.

4 (a) A volunteer firefighter scholarship award shall be made to an appli-
5 cant who:

6 (i) serves as an active volunteer firefighter as defined in subdivi-
7 sion one of section two hundred fifteen of the general municipal law who
8 has attended twenty-five percent of emergency calls for each year; and

9 (ii) complies with the applicable provisions of this article and all
10 requirements promulgated by the office of higher education, hereinafter
11 referred to as the "office", for the administration of the program.

12 (b) Student loans eligible for this program are:

13 (i) student loans accrued while attending a private or public institu-
14 tion of higher education within New York state from which the recipient
15 received credits which were used to acquire a bachelor's degree at an
16 approved program; or

17 (ii) student loans accrued while attending an accredited trade school
18 or vocational program within New York state from which the recipient
19 received a certificate or license.

20 2. Amount. Within amounts appropriated therefor and based on avail-
21 ability of funds, awards shall be granted to applicants that the office
22 has determined are eligible to receive such awards. The office shall
23 grant such awards in an amount up to four times the current tuition rate
24 at a state university of New York college. Upon notification of an award

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 under this program, the office shall pay the interest on the recipient's
2 student loans for eight years and, upon the completion of the program's
3 requirements, any remaining student loan interest and principal up to
4 four times the current tuition rate at a state university of New York
5 college. If the amount of the recipient's remaining student loan inter-
6 est and principal is less than four times the current tuition rate at a
7 state university of New York college at the end of the program, an
8 amount equal to the difference between (a) four times the current
9 tuition rate at a state university of New York college or the initial
10 principal on the recipient's student loans, whichever is less, and (b)
11 the amount of principal and interest paid at the end of the program
12 shall be issued to the recipient. In the event that a recipient fails to
13 maintain eligibility in the program, no further payments shall be made
14 until the recipient again becomes eligible for the program.

15 3. Conditions. (a) A recipient shall agree to reside exclusively in
16 New York state and shall not be employed in any other state, for eight
17 years.

18 (b) A recipient shall be an active volunteer firefighter as defined in
19 subdivision one of section two hundred fifteen of the general municipal
20 law who has attended twenty-five percent of emergency calls for each
21 year, for eight years. The recipient shall annually submit to the office
22 an affidavit signed by his or her chief or company director verifying
23 the recipient's participation in emergency calls is at or above twenty-
24 five percent for the prior year.

25 4. Contract. (a) A recipient shall sign a contract with the office to
26 have his or her full award converted to a student loan according to a
27 schedule to be determined by the office if such recipient fails to
28 fulfill the requirements set out in subdivision three of this section
29 unless such requirement is waived by the commissioner. The terms and
30 conditions of the contract shall be established by the rules and regu-
31 lations by the office. A waiver issued by the commissioner shall only be
32 for up to one year of requirements and must be renewed by the commission
33 to waive requirements for additional years. Any obligation to comply
34 with such provisions as outlined in this paragraph shall be cancelled
35 upon the death of the recipient.

36 (b) The commissioner may, in extreme circumstances including, but not
37 limited to, temporary or permanent disability, illness and family emer-
38 gency resulting in relocation or extended family leave, waive an amount
39 of the award converted into a student loan equal to the amount of the
40 award multiplied by the years the recipient fulfilled his or her
41 requirements under subdivision three of this section divided by eight.

42 (c) Notwithstanding any provisions of this paragraph to the contrary,
43 the office is authorized to promulgate rules and regulations to provide
44 for the waiver or suspension of any financial obligation which would
45 involve extreme hardship.

46 5. Recipient selection. The office shall establish: (a) an application
47 deadline of within two years of completing a qualifying course of study;
48 (b) a method of selecting recipients if in any given year there are
49 insufficient funds to cover the needs of all the applicants provided
50 that priority shall be given to eligible applicants; and (c) a method of
51 recording how much each recipient owes in student loans at any time, how
52 much each recipient had taken out in principal in student loans and how
53 much has been paid on each recipient's student loans by the program.

54 6. Rules and regulations. The office is authorized to promulgate rules
55 and regulations, and may promulgate emergency regulations, necessary for
56 the implementation of the provisions of this section including, but not

1 limited to, the criteria for distributing the awards, which may include
2 a lottery or other form of random selection.

3 § 2. The sum of one million dollars (\$1,000,000), or so much thereof
4 as may be necessary, is hereby annually appropriated out of moneys in
5 the state treasury in the general fund to the credit of the state
6 purposes account, not otherwise appropriated, and made immediately
7 available to the office of higher education of the department of educa-
8 tion for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this act. Such
9 moneys shall be payable on the audit and warrant of the comptroller on
10 vouchers certified or approved in the manner prescribed by law.

11 § 3. This act shall take effect on the one hundred eightieth day after
12 it shall have become a law.