§ 679-a. New York state licensed social worker loan forgiveness program. 1. Purpose. The president shall grant student loan forgiveness awards for the purpose of increasing the number of social workers serving in critical human service areas. For the purposes of this section, the term "critical human service area" shall mean an area in New York state designated by the corporation, in consultation with a committee comprised of one representative each from the corporation, the department, the department of health, the department of mental hygiene, and the office of children and family services, provided that such areas shall include, but not be limited to, areas with a shortage of social workers in home care, health, mental health, substance abuse, aging, HIV/AIDS and child welfare concerns, or communities with multi-lingual needs.

2. Eligibility. To be eligible for an award pursuant to this subdivision, applicants shall (a) be licensed as a social worker pursuant to article one hundred fifty-four of this chapter; (b) comply with subdivisions three and five of section six hundred sixty-one of this part; and (c) have an outstanding student loan debt.

3. Priority. Such awards shall be made annually to applicants in the following priority:

(a) First priority shall be given to applicants who have received payment of an award pursuant to this section in a prior year and who, in the year prior to application, have provided social work services in (i) a critical human service area, or (ii) a previously designated critical human service area;

(b) Second priority shall be given to applicants who have not received payment of an award pursuant to this section in a prior year and who have provided social work services in a critical human service area in the year prior to such application; and

(c) Third priority shall be given to applicants who are economically disadvantaged as defined by the corporation.

4. Awards. The corporation shall grant awards in the value of six thousand five hundred dollars to individuals who have provided full-time social work services in a critical human service area in the year prior

to such application, provided that no recipient shall receive an award that exceeds the total remaining balance of the student loan debt and that no recipient shall receive cumulative awards, pursuant to this section, in excess of twenty-six thousand dollars. Awards shall be within the amounts appropriated for such purpose and based on availability of funds.

5. Rules and regulations. The corporation is authorized to promulgate rules and regulations necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this section. In the event that there are more applicants who have the same priority, as provided in subdivision three of this section, than there are remaining awards, the corporation shall provide in regulation the method of distributing the remaining number of such awards, which may include a lottery or other form of random selection.