

Senate Bill 480

By: Senators Hodges of the 3rd, Kirkpatrick of the 32nd, Watson of the 1st, Hufstetler of the 52nd, Summers of the 13th and others

AS PASSED

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 10 of Title 49 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the
2 Georgia Board of Health Care Workforce, so as to provide for student loan repayment for
3 mental health and substance use professionals serving in certain capacities; to provide for
4 definitions; to authorize the board to approve applications; to provide for eligibility
5 requirements; to provide for loan repayment agreements and conditions; to provide for rules
6 and regulations; to provide for appropriations contingency; to provide for related matters; to
7 repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

9 **SECTION 1.**

10 Chapter 10 of Title 49 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the Georgia
11 Board of Health Care Workforce, is amended by adding a new Code section to read as
12 follows:

13 "49-10-7.

14 (a) As used in this Code section, the term:

15 (1) 'Eligible applicant' means a person who:

- 16 (A) Is a legal resident of the State of Georgia as established by rules and regulations
17 of the board;
- 18 (B) Is a mental health or substance use professional licensed in this state; and
- 19 (C)(i) Provides services to underserved youth in this state; or
20 (ii) Practices in unserved geographic areas or communities in this state that are
21 disproportionately impacted by social determinants of health, as determined by the
22 board.
- 23 (2) 'Mental health or substance use professional' means a psychiatrist, psychologist,
24 professional counselor, social worker, marriage and family therapist, clinical nurse
25 specialist in psychiatric/mental health, or other licensed mental or behavioral health
26 clinician or specialist.
- 27 (3) 'Recipient' means an eligible applicant who applied for and was approved by the
28 board for student loan repayment under this Code section.
- 29 (4) 'Student loan' means debt incurred by an eligible applicant that is:
- 30 (A) Evidenced by a promissory note which required the funds received to be used to
31 pay for the cost of attendance for the undergraduate, graduate, or professional education
32 of the eligible applicant;
- 33 (B) Not in default at the time of application for repayment under this Code section; and
- 34 (C) Not subject to an existing service obligation or to repayment through another
35 student loan repayment or loan forgiveness program or as a condition of employment.
- 36 (b) The board shall have the authority to approve the applications of eligible applicants
37 submitted in accordance with rules and regulations established by the board governing the
38 student loan repayment application process.
- 39 (c) The board is authorized to provide for the repayment of student loans held by recipients
40 in consideration of the recipient performing services as a mental health or substance use
41 professional in accordance with subparagraph (a)(1)(C) of this Code section.

42 (d)(1) Each recipient before being granted any student loan repayment shall enter into
43 a student loan repayment agreement with the board agreeing to the terms and conditions
44 upon which the student loan repayment is granted, including such terms and conditions
45 set forth in this Code section.

46 (2) The board shall have the power to terminate a student loan repayment agreement at
47 any time for any cause deemed sufficient by the board, provided that such power shall not
48 be arbitrarily or unreasonably exercised.

49 (e) Each student loan repayment agreement entered into under the authority granted in this
50 Code section shall:

51 (1) Provide for repayment of the recipient's student loans in a total amount to be
52 determined by the board, but not exceeding the total student loan debt of the recipient,
53 to be paid out in installments made each 12 months over a term of not more than five
54 years. A student loan repayment made pursuant to this Code section shall be paid in such
55 manner as the board shall establish by rules and regulations;

56 (2) Provide that any payment made by the board under a student loan repayment
57 agreement shall be made in consideration of services rendered by the recipient
58 performing services as a mental health or substance use professional in accordance with
59 subparagraph (a)(1)(C) of this Code section;

60 (3) Provide that the board shall make a payment toward the recipient's student loans, in
61 an amount set forth in the agreement, for each 12 months the recipient performs services
62 as a mental health or substance use professional in accordance with
63 subparagraph (a)(1)(C) of this Code section; and

64 (4) Require that the recipient shall remain a legal resident of the state as established by
65 rules and regulations of the board; maintain licensure in this state as a mental health or
66 substance use professional; and perform services as a mental health or substance use
67 professional in accordance with subparagraph (a)(1)(C) of this Code section at all times
68 during the term of the agreement.

69 (f) The board shall adopt such rules and regulations as are reasonable and necessary to
70 implement the provisions of this Code section.

71 (g) Student loan repayment for recipients having entered into a student loan repayment
72 agreement with the board pursuant to this Code section shall be contingent upon the
73 appropriation of funds by the General Assembly for the purposes of this Code section in
74 annual appropriations Acts of the General Assembly."

75 **SECTION 2.**

76 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.