

SB-31

Making modifications to currently existing methods of student financial relief in order to incentivize/increase the number of student-facing mental health professionals in underserved regions.

IN THE SENATE OF THE AMERICAN LEGION BOYS NATION

Mr. Nareddy of Colorado introduced the following bill;

A BILL

Making modifications to currently existing methods of student financial relief in order to incentivize/increase the number of student-facing mental health professionals in underserved regions.

Be it enacted by The American Legion Boys Nation Senate assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Expanding Student Loan Financial Relief for Youth Mental Health Professionals".

SECTION 2. FINDINGS

Congress finds the following:

(1) The United States of America is currently undergoing a youth mental health crisis. Especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, as supported by data from the American Medical Association, a marked increase in the rates of anxiety and depression is observed. This increase is only further evidenced within youth populations as reported by the Centers for Disease Prevention.

(2) In addressing this crisis, an important aspect of the solution involves ensuring adequate and equitable access to mental health care/providers. Given that more than 70% of youth receive their mental health support through a school-based system, it is imperative that adequate support be available through schools for youth.

(3) The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist to 500 students. However, the actual ratio is closer to 1 school psychologist to 1200 students, and in some states, the ratio can be 1 psychologist to 5000 students. Part of this issue comes down to a lack of school psychologists due to a dual deterrence of location of practice and cost in obtaining the degrees necessary for practice.

SECTION 3. MODIFICATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM

The Secretary of Education shall put forth amendments to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (Section 685.218 of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations) to expand the scope of the program for student-facing mental health professionals. The amendments shall-

(1) Create an exception to the standard 120 qualifying monthly payment clause of forgiveness for those practicing in a student-facing position in the capacity of a mental health professional.

(2) This exception shall only require 36 qualifying monthly payments granted that the individual practices in a region that is designated as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) as defined by the Health Resources and Service Administration.

SECTION 4. TIMELINE OF AMENDMENT AND APPORTIONMENT

The defined amendments to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF) must be made prior to the completion of the fiscal year following the passage of this bill. Any estimated apportionments from the expansion of the PSLF Program should be incorporated into the standard process of departmental budget requests.