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SYNOPSIS
Establishes tuition reimbursement program for certain advanced practice nurses who provide mental health care services in underserved areas in New Jersey.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.
AN ACT establishing a tuition reimbursement program for certain advanced practice nurses who provide mental health services in New Jersey and supplementing chapter 71C of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. As used in this act:
   “Authority” means the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority.
   “Eligible tuition expenses” means tuition expenses that were incurred by a program participant in attending an accredited advanced practice nurse program, and which were not covered by any grants or scholarships.
   “Program” means the tuition reimbursement program for advanced practice nurses established pursuant to this act.
   “Program participant” means an individual who is certified by the New Jersey Board of Nursing as an advanced practice nurse, and who contracts with the authority to provide mental health care services in a State underserved area in return for tuition reimbursement provided under the program.
   “State underserved area” means a geographic area in this State which the Commissioner of Health determines on the basis of health status and economic indicators as having a shortage of medical professionals who provide mental health care services.

2. a. There is established in the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority a tuition reimbursement program for advanced practice nurses who provide mental health care services in a State underserved area. The program shall provide reimbursement to program participants for a portion of the eligible tuition expenses incurred by the participant in attending an accredited advanced practice nurse program.
   b. A program participant shall enter into a contract with the authority for a specified number of one-year periods of service, up to four years, in which the participant agrees to engage in the full-time practice of mental health care in a State underserved area. The agreement shall specify the program participant’s dates of required service and the total amount of reimbursement of eligible tuition expenses to be received by the participant in return for service.
   c. The tuition reimbursement for a participant under the program shall equal 25 percent of the participant’s eligible tuition expenses for the one academic year of an advanced practice nurse program in which tuition was the lowest, in return for each full year of service satisfactorily completed by the participant under the program. The total tuition reimbursement amount for a program participant, for four full years of service, shall not exceed 100
percent of the participant’s eligible tuition expenses for the one
academic year of an advanced practice nurse program in which
tuition was the lowest.

3. To be eligible to participate in the program, an applicant
shall:
   a. be a resident of New Jersey;
   b. be certified by the New Jersey Board of Nursing as an
      advanced practice nurse;
   c. have received specialized education or training in providing
      mental health care services;
   d. apply for the program within one year of obtaining
      certification as an advanced practice nurse; and
   e. agree to engage in the full-time practice of mental health
      care in a State underserved area for a period of one to four years in
      return for the tuition reimbursement provided under the program.

4. a. The Commissioner of Health shall designate State
     underserved areas which have a shortage of medical professionals
     who provide mental health care services. In designating State
     underserved areas, the commissioner shall consider health status
     criteria and economic indicators including, but not limited to, the
     financial resources of the population who resides in the area under
     consideration, and the population’s access to mental health care
     services.
     b. The Commissioner of Health shall transmit to the authority a
        list of the State underserved areas and the projected number of
        mental health care providers needed in each area.

5. The contract entered into between a program participant and
the authority pursuant to section 2 of this act shall require a
program participant to:
   a. charge for professional services at the usual and customary
      rate prevailing in the State underserved area, but allow a patient
      who is unable to pay that charge to pay at a reduced rate or receive
      care at no charge;
   b. not discriminate against any patient in the provision of
      mental health care services on the basis of that person’s ability to
      pay or source of payment; and
   c. agree not to impose any charge in excess of the limiting fee
      for a service, as determined by the United States Secretary of
      Health and Human Services, to a recipient of benefits under the
      federal Medicare program established pursuant to Pub.L.89-97 (42
      U.S.C. s.1395 et seq.).

6. A program participant, as a condition of participation, shall
be required to adhere to performance standards established by the
authority. The standards shall include, but not be limited to, requirements that a program participant:

a. maintain residency in the State;

b. maintain certification to practice as an advanced practice nurse in the State;

c. remain current with payments on any student loans;

d. maintain satisfactory performance of services rendered in a State underserved area; and

e. report to the authority, on a form and in a manner prescribed by the authority, on the program participant’s performance of services rendered prior to reimbursement of tuition under the program.

7. An individual who is participating in the Primary Care Practitioner Loan Redemption Program, N.J.S.18A:71C-32 et seq., or in the federally administered National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program, section 338B of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. s.254l-1), shall not be eligible to participate simultaneously in the tuition reimbursement program established pursuant to this act.

8. The authority shall promulgate regulations pursuant to the “Administrative Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), necessary to effectuate the provisions of this act.

9. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill establishes a tuition reimbursement program for advanced practice nurses who provide mental health care services in order to address a shortage of mental health care access in certain areas of the State. Under the bill, the Commissioner of Health will designate, on the basis of health status and economic indicators, geographic areas of the State which have a shortage of medical professionals who provide mental health care services. The program will provide reimbursement of a portion of tuition expenses in attending an accredited advanced practice nurse program to advanced practice nurses who agree to provide mental health care services in one of these State underserved areas for a period of one to four years. A program participant must: (1) be a State resident; (2) be certified by the New Jersey Board of Nursing as an advanced practice nurse; (3) have specialized education or training in mental health care; and (4) apply for the program within one year of obtaining certification as an advanced practice nurse.
Program participants will enter into a contract with the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) for a specified number of one-year periods of service, up to four years, in which the participant agrees to engage in the full-time practice of mental health care in a State underserved area. In return for this commitment, a portion of the participant’s tuition expenses in attending an accredited advanced practice nurse program will be reimbursed. Tuition reimbursement will equal 25 percent of the participant’s eligible tuition expenses for the one academic year of an advanced practice nurse program in which tuition was the lowest, in return for each full year of service under the program. The maximum total tuition reimbursement for a participant for four years of service will be 100 percent of the participant’s eligible tuition expenses for the one academic year of an advanced practice nurse program in which tuition was the lowest.

Under the bill, participants in the program will be required to adhere to certain terms and standards, including charging for professional services at the usual and customary rates, allowing patients who are unable to pay that charge to pay a reduced rate or receive care at no charge, and not discriminating against any patient on the basis of ability to pay. Participants will also be required to maintain their State residency and certification to practice as an advanced practice nurse, remain current with payments on any student loans, maintain satisfactory performance of services, and report to HESAA on the performance of services rendered prior to receiving tuition reimbursement.