SENATE DOCKET, NO. 426 FILED ON: 1/13/2009

SENATE . . . . . No. 616

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand Nine

An Act establishing an education loan repayment program for social workers and direct care human service workers..

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. Chapter 15A of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the following section:

Section 19F. There shall be a licensed social worker and credentialed direct care human service workers student loan repayment program for the purpose of increasing and retaining access to child welfare services and social services in the commonwealth. The program shall provide financial assistance for the repayment of qualified education loans, as defined below, and shall be administered by the board of higher education in collaboration with the executive office of health and human services. The program shall be subject to appropriation.

The term "qualified education loan" shall mean any indebtedness including interest on such indebtedness incurred to pay tuition or other direct expenses incurred in connection with the pursuit of a certificate, undergraduate or graduate degree by an applicant, but shall not include loans made by any person related to the applicant, or loans paid by credit card.

The board, in collaboration with the executive office of health and human services, shall promulgate guidelines governing the program. These guidelines shall include the following provisions:

(1) eligibility shall be limited to persons with incomes that do not exceed 500% of the federal poverty level;

(2) eligibility shall be limited to persons entering the field of social work or credentialed direct care human service workers after July 1, 2008;

(3) eligibility shall be limited to (a) social workers licensed under chapter 112 who are employed in child welfare or in a geographic or programmatic setting defined as high need according to the guidelines governing the program, or

(b) credentialed direct care human service workers; "credentialed direct care human service worker" is defined as a credentialed worker who provides services by supporting individuals and families efforts to function in daily living situations. Human service worker is a generic term for people who hold professional and paraprofessional jobs in settings such as group homes and halfway houses; institutional or residential settings; correctional, mental retardation, and community mental health centers; family, child, and youth service agencies, and programs concerned with alcoholism, drug abuse, family violence, and aging; in addition such worker shall have passed the course requirements and been issued a credential by the Massachusetts Council of Human Services Providers.;

(4) the commonwealth shall repay a qualified education loan at a rate not to exceed $250 per month for a period not to exceed 48 months;

(5) payments by the commonwealth shall be made to directly to the lender on behalf of a program participant, and shall cover only loan payments owed by the participant in the months during which the participant works in the commonwealth as a social worker or as a credentialed direct care human service workers; and

(6) the program guidelines shall set forth an affirmative action policy and goals.