

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 47

(Delegate Luedtke, *et al.*)

Ways and Means

Special Education - Loan Assistance Repayment and Paraprofessional Training

This bill expands eligibility for the Nancy Grasmick Teacher Award within the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program (LARP) to a special education public school teacher who has taught in Maryland for a least two years and meets other qualifications. The bill also expands who must be given priority to participate in the Hoffman LARP to include public school special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and paraprofessionals who meet other qualifications. By January 1, 2016, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must study and make recommendations regarding the training of paraprofessional school employees.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2015.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$12,000 in FY 2016 for one-time contractual costs associated with updating the Maryland Higher Education Commission's (MHEC) scholarship system. Individuals can be added to the Hoffman LARP waitlist at no additional cost. Expanding eligibility for the grant *may* require general fund expenditures of an estimated \$5,800 for each additional grant awarded beginning in FY 2016. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: LARP provides loan repayment assistance in exchange for certain service commitments to help ensure that underserved areas of the State have sufficient numbers of primary care physicians, dentists, and professionals serving underserved areas of the State or low-income families. The program is subdivided into the Janet L. Hoffman LARP, the Maryland Dent Care LARP, and the Maryland LARP for Physicians and Physicians Assistants. Individuals must be employed full time in State or local government or in a nonprofit organization that assists low-income, underserved residents or underserved areas in the State.

Janet L. Hoffman LARP

Eligible employment fields include lawyers, degree- or diploma-holding registered nurses, licensed clinical therapists, physical and occupational therapists, social workers, speech pathologists, and teachers who have received a resident teacher certificate from MSDE after completing an approved alternative teaching preparation program.

Chapter 496 of 2012 established the Nancy Grasmick Teacher Award within Janet L. Hoffman LARP for Maryland public school teachers who have taught in Maryland for at least two years in (1) science, technology, engineering, or math subjects or (2) a school in which at least 75% of the students are enrolled in the free and reduced-price meal program. A teacher must also have received the highest performance evaluation rating for the most recent year available.

According to statute, the Office of Student Financial Assistance may adopt regulations to establish the maximum starting income for eligibility, the maximum total income for eligibility, and the limit on the total amount of assistance provided.

Priority is given to individuals who have graduated from an institution of higher education in the last three years. Priority employment fields established by law are legal services and nursing. Priority for awards is also given to applicants who are employed as nurse faculty members or applicants who teach in schools designated as federal Title I, schools identified for improvement by MSDE, or designated critical shortage subject fields; and teachers who qualify for a Nancy Grasmick Teacher Award. Awards are capped at \$10,000 per year.

The Governor's proposed fiscal 2016 budget includes \$1.5 million in general funds and \$75,000 in special funds for Janet L. Hoffman LARP. MHEC reports that, in fiscal 2014, 234 awards were made, and the average award amount was \$5,753. In fiscal 2014, 62 applicants were placed on the waiting list due to lack of funds.

Background: According to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 13A.12.02.20), in order to receive one of the three types of special education certificates (*i.e.*, infant/primary, elementary/middle, secondary/adult), an applicant must have a bachelor's degree from an institution of higher education and a specified number of credit hours (between 51 and 63) in specified course material. A teacher holding a professional certificate in another area who wants to be certified as a generic special education teacher must complete 24 credit hours of specified course material.

Under COMAR 13A.12.03.10 a speech-language pathologist holding a current and valid license issued by the State Board of Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, and Speech-Language Pathologists in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Health Occupations Article must be considered professionally certificated.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind law, a paraprofessional must have (1) completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education; (2) obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or (3) met a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal State or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing (or writing readiness), and mathematics (or mathematics readiness).

According to MSDE, in Maryland there are approximately 8,150 highly qualified special education teachers; 5,570 qualified paraprofessionals serving children with disabilities; and 1,360 fully certified speech-language pathologists. There are paraprofessionals employed by local school systems

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures increase by \$12,000 in fiscal 2016 for one-time contractual costs associated with updating MHEC's scholarship system. Additional individuals can be added to the waitlist at no additional cost beyond this one-time contractual costs. However, expanding eligibility for the grant *may* result in general fund expenditures of an estimated \$5,753 for each additional grant awarded beginning in fiscal 2016. MHEC can handle additional applications related to the grant using existing resources. The following information and assumptions were used in making this estimate.

- MHEC reports modifying and testing the scholarship web portal (known as the Maryland College Aid Processing System) to add a new grant to the Workforce Shortage Student Assistance Grants costs approximately \$12,000.
- According to MHEC, the average Janet L. Hoffman LARP award in fiscal 2014 was \$5,753. It is assumed the average award amount remains the same if eligibility is expanded.

- The amount of additional expenditures, if any, depends on the amount of funds appropriated to the grant program; regardless of the type of scholarship, the program receives a single appropriation.

MSDE can complete the required study regarding the training of paraprofessional school employees using existing resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Higher Education Commission, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

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