

1 AN ACT concerning education.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**  
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Public  
5 Interest Attorney Assistance Act.

6 Section 5. Legislative findings. The General Assembly  
7 finds the following:

8 (1) Equal access to justice is a basic right that is  
9 fundamental to democracy in this State, and the integrity  
10 of this State and this State's justice system depends on  
11 protecting and enforcing the rights of all people.

12 (2) Equal access to justice is an integral part of the  
13 general public welfare.

14 (3) Vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens of this  
15 State are unable to protect or enforce their rights without  
16 legal assistance from public interest attorneys.

17 (4) Graduating law students and practicing attorneys  
18 are increasingly unable to continue in public interest  
19 attorney positions because of high student loan debt.

20 (5) Assisting public interest attorneys with loan  
21 forgiveness is a major step toward ensuring quality legal  
22 representation for this State's most vulnerable citizens.

23 (6) The collection and distribution of funds under this

1 Act promotes equal access to justice and is in the public  
2 interest.

3 (7) The use of funds for the purposes prescribed by  
4 this Act is consistent with providing equal access to  
5 justice.

6 Section 10. Purpose. The purpose of this Act is to  
7 encourage qualified individuals to enter into and continue in  
8 employment in this State as assistant State's Attorneys,  
9 assistant Public Defenders, civil legal aid attorneys,  
10 assistant Attorneys General, and assistant public guardians  
11 and to protect and enforce the rights of this State's most  
12 vulnerable citizens.

13 Section 15. Definitions. For the purposes of this Act:

14 "Assistant State's Attorney" means a full-time employee of  
15 a State's Attorney in Illinois or the State's Attorneys  
16 Appellate Prosecutor who is continually licensed to practice  
17 law and prosecutes or defends cases on behalf of the State or a  
18 county.

19 "Assistant Attorney General" means a full-time employee of  
20 the Illinois Attorney General who is continually licensed to  
21 practice law and prosecutes or defends cases on behalf of the  
22 State.

23 "Assistant Public Defender" means a full-time employee of a  
24 Public Defender in Illinois or the State Appellate Defender who

1 is continually licensed to practice law and provides legal  
2 representation to indigent persons, as provided by statute.

3 "Assistant public guardian" means a full-time employee of a  
4 public guardian in Illinois who is continually licensed to  
5 practice law and provides legal representation pursuant to  
6 court appointment.

7 "Civil legal aid" means free or reduced-cost legal  
8 representation or advice to low-income clients in non-criminal  
9 matters.

10 "Civil legal aid attorney" means an attorney who is  
11 continually licensed to practice law and is employed full time  
12 as an attorney at a civil legal aid organization in Illinois.

13 "Civil legal aid organization" means a not-for-profit  
14 corporation in Illinois that (i) is exempt from the payment of  
15 federal income tax pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the  
16 Internal Revenue Code, (ii) is established for the purpose of  
17 providing legal services that include civil legal aid, (iii)  
18 employs 2 or more full-time attorneys who are licensed to  
19 practice law in this State and who directly provide civil legal  
20 aid, and (iv) is in compliance with registration and filing  
21 requirements that are applicable under the Charitable Trust Act  
22 and the Solicitation for Charity Act.

23 "Commission" means the Illinois Student Assistance  
24 Commission.

25 "Committee" means the advisory committee created under  
26 Section 20 of this Act.

1 "Eligible debt" means outstanding principal, interest, and  
2 related fees from loans obtained for undergraduate, graduate,  
3 or law school educational expenses made by government or  
4 commercial lending institutions or educational institutions.  
5 "Eligible debt" excludes loans made by a private individual or  
6 family member.

7 "Program" means the Public Interest Attorney Loan  
8 Repayment Assistance Program.

9 "Public interest attorney" means an attorney practicing in  
10 Illinois who is an assistant State's Attorney, assistant Public  
11 Defender, civil legal aid attorney, assistant Attorney  
12 General, or assistant public guardian.

13 "Qualifying employer" means (i) an Illinois State's  
14 Attorney or the State's Attorneys Appellate Prosecutor, (ii) an  
15 Illinois Public Defender or the State Appellate Defender, (iii)  
16 an Illinois civil legal aid organization, (iv) the Illinois  
17 Attorney General, or (v) an Illinois public guardian.

18 Section 20. Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment  
19 Assistance Program.

20 (a) The Commission shall establish and administer the  
21 Program for the primary purpose of providing loan repayment  
22 assistance to practicing attorneys to encourage them to pursue  
23 careers as public interest attorneys to protect and enforce the  
24 rights of this State's most vulnerable citizens. The Commission  
25 shall create an advisory committee composed of representatives

1 from organizations with relevant expertise, including one  
2 person from each of the following entities:

- 3 (1) The Illinois State's Attorneys Association.
- 4 (2) An office of an Illinois Public Defender.
- 5 (3) An office of an Illinois public guardian.
- 6 (4) The Office of the Illinois Attorney General.
- 7 (5) The Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice.
- 8 (6) The Chicago Bar Association.
- 9 (7) The Illinois State Bar Association.
- 10 (8) A public law school in this State.

11 (b) The Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment Assistance  
12 Fund is created as a special fund in the State treasury. The  
13 Fund shall consist of all moneys remitted to the Commission  
14 under the terms of this Act. All money in the Fund shall be  
15 used, subject to appropriation, by the Commission for the  
16 purposes of this Act.

17 (c) Subject to the availability of appropriations and  
18 subsections (d) and (e) of this Section, the Commission shall  
19 distribute funds to eligible applicants.

20 (d) The Commission is authorized to prescribe all rules,  
21 policies, and procedures necessary or convenient for the  
22 administration of the Program and all terms and conditions  
23 applicable to payments made under this Act. This shall be done  
24 with the guidance and assistance of the Committee.

25 (e) The Commission shall administer the Program,  
26 including, but not limited to, establishing and implementing

1 the following:

2 (1) An application process. Subject to the  
3 availability of appropriations, the Commission shall, each  
4 year, consider applications by eligible public interest  
5 attorneys for loan repayment assistance under the Program.

6 (2) Eligibility requirements. The Commission shall, on  
7 an annual basis, receive and consider applications for loan  
8 repayment assistance under the Program if the Commission  
9 finds that the applicant:

10 (i) is a citizen or permanent resident of the  
11 United States;

12 (ii) is a licensed member of the Illinois Bar in  
13 good standing;

14 (iii) has eligible debt in grace or repayment  
15 status; and

16 (iv) is employed as a public interest attorney with  
17 a qualifying employer in Illinois.

18 (3) A maximum amount of loan repayment assistance for  
19 each participant, which shall be \$6,000 per year, up to a  
20 maximum of \$30,000 during the participant's career.

21 (4) Prioritization. The Commission shall develop  
22 criteria for prioritization among eligible applicants in  
23 the event that there are insufficient funds available to  
24 make payments to all eligible applicants under this Act.  
25 The prioritization criteria shall include the timeliness  
26 of the application, the applicant's salary level, the

1 amount of the applicant's eligible debt, the availability  
2 of other loan repayment assistance to the applicant, the  
3 applicant's length of service as a public interest  
4 attorney, and the applicant's prior participation in the  
5 Program.

6 (f) The distribution of funds available after  
7 administrative costs must be made by the Commission to eligible  
8 public interest attorneys in the following manner:

9 (1) Loan repayment assistance must be in the form of a  
10 forgivable loan.

11 (2) To have the loan forgiven, the participant shall  
12 (i) complete a year of employment with a qualifying  
13 employer and (ii) make educational debt payments (interest  
14 or principal or both) that equal at least the amount of  
15 assistance received under the Program during the  
16 assistance year.

17 (3) Each loan must be documented by means of a  
18 promissory note executed by the borrower in a form provided  
19 by the Commission and shall be forgiven when an eligible  
20 participant meets the requirements set forth by the  
21 Commission.

22 Section 25. Ineligibility and termination of funds;  
23 procedures.

24 (a) If a participant becomes ineligible during the term of  
25 a loan, he or she must repay the outstanding amount of any loan

1 received from the Commission.

2 (b) The Commission may in its discretion forgive the loan  
3 of a participant in whole or in part in certain circumstances  
4 as set forth in its written policies and guidelines.

5 Section 30. Other powers. The Commission may make, enter  
6 into, and execute contracts, agreements, leases, and other  
7 instruments with any person, including without limitation any  
8 federal, State, or local governmental agency, and may take  
9 other actions that may be necessary or convenient to accomplish  
10 any purpose authorized by this Act.

11 Section 90. The State Finance Act is amended by adding  
12 Section 5.708 as follows:

13 (30 ILCS 105/5.708 new)

14 Sec. 5.708. The Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment  
15 Assistance Fund.