

Background:

The Mental Health Loan Repayment Program was created through SB 239 by Senator Schwertner (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=84R&Bill=SB239>) in the 84th Legislative session. It allows Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Clinical Social Workers to apply for assistance in repaying their student loans as long as they meet certain stipulations: acceptance of Medicaid or Medicare eligible clients, employment for one, two, three, four, or five consecutive years of practice in a mental health professional shortage area designated by the Department of State Health Services, or are involved with the criminal justice system.

The Federal Government has a similar State Loan Repayment program administered through HRSA: <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/currentmembers/stateloanrepaymentprogram/eligibility/index.html> and provided one-to-one matching dollars to state programs, with a cap of \$1 million. The last time the program was open to states for application in 2014, all 38 states who applied received funds (Texas did not have a mental health loan repayment program at the time). The next round of applications will be opened in 2018, and Texas could receive up to **\$1 million a year for 4 years**.

NASW/TX hosted a call with representatives from HRSA and discussed the eligibility requirements and Texas' current program, and it was determined that the agency that houses the program, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, is eligible to apply for funds, and since Texas currently funds our program at \$2.7 million for the biennium, would be able to ask for \$1 million in matching funds. The only area where Texas did not meet the eligibility requirements for the funds was in length of time in the program. The SLRP requires a minimum of a 2 year commitment.

We reached out to Senator Schwertner and his staff, and they indicated that they were interested in seeing Texas apply for these funds, and are open to a modification of the rules to require a two year commitment.

Recommendation:

Suggested language to amend the current statute to include language that requires an individual to remain in the program for at least two years:

EDUCATION CODE

TITLE 3. HIGHER EDUCATION

SUBTITLE B. STATE COORDINATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

CHAPTER 61. TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

SUBCHAPTER A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Sec. 61.001. SHORT TITLE. This chapter may be cited as the Higher Education Coordinating Act of 1965.

Acts 1971, 62nd Leg., p. 3072, ch. 1024, art. 1, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1971.

Sec. 61.604. LIMITATIONS. (a) A mental health professional may receive repayment assistance under this subchapter for not more than five years, and must complete a minimum of two years in the program.

(b) Not more than 10 percent of the number of repayment assistance grants paid under this subchapter each year may be awarded to mental health professionals providing mental health services described by Section [61.603](#) (a) (3) (C) .

(c) Not more than 30 percent of the number of repayment assistance grants paid under this subchapter each year may be awarded to mental health professionals in any one of the professions listed in Section [61.601](#) .