



103RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State of Illinois

2023 and 2024

SB3579

Introduced 2/9/2024, by Sen. Mattie Hunter

SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

New Act

Creates the Loan Repayment Assistance for Optometrists Act. Provides that the Department of Public Health shall establish an educational loan repayment assistance program for optometrists who practice in this State to increase the total number of optometrists in this State. Provides that, beginning July 1, 2025, the Department shall, each year, consider applications for assistance under the program; sets forth other provisions concerning applications for assistance. Provides that an applicant is eligible for assistance if, among other qualifications, the applicant is practicing full time in this State as an optometrist, is currently repaying educational loans, and agrees to continue full time practice in this State for at least 3 years. Provides that for each year that a qualified applicant practices full time in this State as an optometrist, the Department shall award a grant to that person in an amount equal to the amount in educational loans that the person must repay that year; specifies other grant requirements. Sets forth provisions concerning administration, rulemaking, appropriations, and a penalty for the failure to fulfill the work obligation. Effective January 1, 2025.

LRB103 36388 RJT 66489 b

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 Loan
5 Repayment Assistance for Optometrists Act.

6 Section 5. Purpose. The purpose of this Act is to
7 establish a program in the Department of Public Health to
8 increase the total number of optometrists in this State by
9 providing educational loan repayment assistance grants to
10 optometrists.

11 Section 10. Definitions. In this Act, unless the context
12 otherwise requires:

13 "Department" means the Department of Public Health.

14 "Educational loans" means higher education student loans
15 that a person has incurred in attending an approved
16 professional optometric education program.

17 "Optometrist" means a person licensed under the Illinois
18 Optometric Practice Act of 1987 to practice optometry.

19 "Program" means the educational loan repayment assistance
20 program for optometrists established by the Department under
21 this Act.

1 Section 15. Establishment of program. The Department shall
2 establish an educational loan repayment assistance program for
3 optometrists who practice in this State. The Department shall
4 administer the program and make all necessary and proper rules
5 not inconsistent with this Act for the program's effective
6 implementation. The Department may use up to 5% of the
7 appropriation for this program for administration and
8 promotion of optometrist incentive programs.

9 Section 20. Application. Beginning July 1, 2025, the
10 Department shall, each year, consider applications for
11 assistance under the program. The form of application and the
12 information required to be set forth in the application shall
13 be determined by the Department, and the Department shall
14 require applicants to submit with their applications such
15 supporting documents as the Department deems necessary.

16 Section 25. Eligibility. To be eligible for assistance
17 under the program, an applicant must meet all of the following
18 qualifications:

19 (1) He or she must be a citizen or permanent resident
20 of the United States.

21 (2) He or she must be a resident of this State.

22 (3) He or she must be practicing full time in this
23 State as an optometrist.

24 (4) He or she must currently be repaying educational

1 loans.

2 (5) He or she must agree to continue full time
3 practice in this State for at least 3 years.

4 Section 30. Award of grants. Under the program, for each
5 year that a qualified applicant practices full time in this
6 State as an optometrist, the Department shall, subject to
7 appropriation, award a grant to that person in an amount equal
8 to the amount in educational loans that the person must repay
9 that year. However, the total amount in grants that a person
10 may be awarded under the program may not exceed \$25,000. The
11 Department shall require recipients to use the grants to pay
12 off their educational loans.

13 Section 35. Penalty for failure to fulfill obligation.
14 Loan repayment recipients who fail to practice full time in
15 this State for at least 3 years shall repay the Department a
16 sum equal to the amount received under the program, plus
17 interest.

18 Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect January
19 1, 2025.