

By: Zaffirini

S.B. No. 32

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

1  
2 relating to a student loan repayment assistance program for certain  
3 professionals for exceptional service to the State of Texas during  
4 the coronavirus pandemic.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

6 SECTION 1. This Act shall be known as the Thanking Our  
7 Frontline Heroes Student Loan Relief Act.

8 SECTION 2. Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by adding  
9 Subchapter NO to read as follows:

10 SUBCHAPTER NO: FRONTLINE WORKERS LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE  
11 PROGRAM

12 Sec. 61.9961. DEFINITION. (a) In this subchapter,  
13 "frontline worker" means any person providing health, education,  
14 public safety, or other necessary support services related to the  
15 coronavirus pandemic, as determined by the board.

16 (b) The board, in consultation with relevant state  
17 agencies, shall develop a list of occupations that can qualify as a  
18 frontline worker, which shall include:

19 (1) employees of public schools, open enrollment  
20 charter schools, and private schools;

21 (2) employees of public and private institutions of  
22 higher education;

23 (3) peace officers;

24 (4) fire fighters;

1           (5) emergency medical technicians;

2           (6) medical professionals, including doctors,  
3 physician assistants, nurses, nurse practitioners, mental health  
4 professionals, and hospital support personnel;

5           (7) employees of nursing homes, state supported living  
6 centers, or similar long-term care facilities;

7           (8) employees of child care facilities;

8           (9) social workers; and

9           (10) members of the Texas military forces, United  
10 State armed forces, or a reserve component of the armed forces who  
11 participated in coronavirus-related service.

12           Sec. 61.9962. LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED;  
13 PURPOSE. The board shall establish and administer a program to  
14 provide, in accordance with this subchapter and board rules, loan  
15 repayment assistance in the repayment of eligible loans for  
16 eligible frontline workers who provided necessary services during  
17 the coronavirus pandemic.

18           Sec. 61.9963. ELIGIBILITY. (a) To be eligible to receive  
19 loan repayment assistance under this subchapter, a person must:

20           (1) be a Texas resident at the time of application;

21           (2) for a substantial portion, as determined by board  
22 rules, of the period between March 15, 2020 and December 31, 2020,  
23 have been employed as a frontline worker; and

24           (3) submit to the board an application for the loan  
25 repayment assistance, in the manner and on a form prescribed by the  
26 board, that requires:

27           (A) employer verification or other

1 documentation, as established by board rule, of the person's  
2 employment as a frontline worker in the specified period of time;  
3 and

4 (B) a statement of the total amount of principal,  
5 accrued interest, fees, and other charges due on all outstanding  
6 eligible loans for which the person is applying for repayment  
7 assistance;

8 (4) have earned a degree or certification from a  
9 public or private institution of higher education or earned at  
10 least 30 semester credit hours before the person's initial  
11 employment as a frontline worker; and

12 (5) comply with any other requirement adopted by the  
13 board under this subchapter.

14 (b) The board shall establish by rule a time period during  
15 which applications may be submitted of no less than 90 calendar  
16 days.

17 Sec. 61.9964. AWARD. (a) Except as provided by this  
18 section, an eligible person is entitled to receive an amount of loan  
19 repayment assistance under this chapter payable to the holders of  
20 the eligible person's eligible loans in an amount equal to the  
21 lesser of \$5,000 or the balance of the total amount stated in the  
22 person's application under Sec. 61.9963, subject to the amount of  
23 available funding.

24 (b) An eligible person may receive only one award under this  
25 subchapter.

26 (c) If the amount of money available for loan repayment  
27 assistance under this subchapter is insufficient to provide loan

1 repayment assistance to all eligible persons, the board shall  
2 establish criteria to determine the amount of available money to  
3 allocate to the holders of student loans of eligible persons as the  
4 board determines appropriate to further the purpose of this  
5 subchapter.

6 (d) An eligible person whose loan repayment assistance  
7 under this section is less than the amount necessary to cover the  
8 amount of principal and interest due on the person's eligible loans  
9 for the period in which the award is disbursed is responsible for  
10 the payment of the remainder of the amount due and for otherwise  
11 preventing a default on the loan.

12 Sec. 61.6695. ELIGIBLE LOANS. (a) The board may provide  
13 loan repayment assistance under this subchapter for the repayment  
14 of any student loan received by an eligible person through any  
15 lender for the cost of attendance at an institution of higher  
16 education or a private or independent institution of higher  
17 education.

18 (b) If the loan is not a state or federal guaranteed student  
19 loan, the promissory note or other loan agreement document  
20 governing the terms of the loan must require all the loan proceeds  
21 to be used for expenses incurred by a person in attending an  
22 institution of higher education or a private or independent  
23 institution of higher education.

24 Sec. 61.9966. PAYMENT OF LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE.

25 (a) The board shall pay any loan repayment assistance under this  
26 subchapter in a lump sum delivered on the eligible person's behalf  
27 directly to the holder of the loan.

1        (b) Loan repayment assistance provided under this  
2 subchapter may be applied to any amount due on the loan.

3        (c) The board shall attempt to allocate all money available  
4 to the board for the purpose of providing loan repayment assistance  
5 under this subchapter.

6        Sec. 61.9967. GIFTS, GRANTS, AND DONATIONS. The board may  
7 solicit and accept gifts, grants, and other donations from any  
8 public or private source for the purposes of this subchapter.

9        Sec. 61.9968. RULES; POSTING REQUIRED. (a) The board shall  
10 adopt rules necessary for the administration of this subchapter.

11        (b) The board shall post on the board's Internet website a  
12 copy of the rules adopted under this subchapter and information  
13 regarding the program established under this subchapter.

14        (c) The board may advertise in any available media or  
15 otherwise promote the loan repayment assistance program to further  
16 the purposes of this chapter.

17        Sec. 61.9969. EXPIRATION. This subchapter expires December  
18 31, 2022.

19        SECTION 3. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
20 shall adopt rules for the frontline workers loan repayment  
21 assistance program under Subchapter NO, Chapter 61, Education Code,  
22 as added by this Act, not later than December 1, 2021.

23        SECTION 4. This Act takes effect September 1, 2021.