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H.B. 5
133rd General Assembly

Bill Analysis

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsor: Reps. Hillyer and Leland

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SUMMARY

- Creates the Ohio Public Defender State Loan Repayment Program under which the State Public Defender may repay an attorney's student loans if the attorney agrees to be a public defender for at least three years in a public defender shortage area.
- Establishes the Public Defender Loan Repayment Fund.
- Allows an attorney to claim an income tax deduction for amounts repaid by the State Public Defender under the program.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Ohio Public Defender State Loan Repayment Program

The bill creates the Ohio Public Defender State Loan Repayment Program. Under the program, the State Public Defender (SPD) may repay a certain amount of an educational loan taken by an attorney in exchange for the attorney's employment as a public defender¹ in a "public defender shortage area."²

Currently, the Department of Health administers similar loan repayment programs for physicians, dentists, and dental hygienists providing services in health or dental resource shortage areas.³

¹ Includes an attorney employed by the SPD, a county public defender commission, or a joint county public defender commission to represent indigent persons.

² R.C. 120.61 to 120.68.

³ R.C. 3702.75, 3702.85, and 3702.96, not in the bill.

Eligibility

To be eligible to participate in the program, an individual must be either of the following:

- A student enrolled in the final year of law school;
- An attorney admitted to the practice of law in Ohio.

In addition, the individual must be a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or permanent U.S. resident.⁴

Educational expenses

Under the program, an attorney may seek reimbursement for the following educational expenses: tuition, room and board, and other expenses including fees and books. With respect to room and board and other expenses, the amount of those expenses must be determined reasonable by the SPD.⁵

Repayment amounts

The bill requires the SPD to determine the amounts that will be paid as loan repayments on behalf of program participants. For a three-year service obligation, no repayment may exceed \$50,000 for full-time employment⁶ or \$25,000 for part-time employment.⁷ For one or two additional years, the attorney may receive an additional repayment not exceeding \$35,000 for full-time employment or \$17,500 for part-time employment.⁸ An attorney may claim an income tax deduction for amounts repaid by the SPD under the program.⁹

Failure to complete service obligation

Under the bill, if an attorney fails to complete the attorney's three-, four-, or five-year service obligation, the attorney must pay the SPD an amount set by rule by the SPD.¹⁰

Application

An individual seeking to participate in the program must apply to the SPD and submit all of the following information:

- The applicant's name, address, and telephone number;

⁴ R.C. 120.64(A).

⁵ R.C. 120.62.

⁶ Minimum of 40 hours/week for a minimum of 45 weeks/year.

⁷ Minimum of 20 hours/week for a minimum of 45 weeks/year.

⁸ R.C. 120.66(B).

⁹ R.C. 5747.01(A)(34).

¹⁰ R.C. 120.66(B)(3).

- The law school the applicant is attending or attended, the dates of attendance, and verification of attendance;
- If applicable, the applicant's employer;
- A summary and verification of the educational expenses for which the applicant seeks reimbursement under the program;
- If applicable, verification the applicant has been admitted to the practice of law in Ohio;
- Verification the applicant is a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or permanent U.S. resident.¹¹

Approval of an application

The SPD is required to approve an application for participation if funds are available in the Ohio Public Defender State Loan Repayment Fund and the General Assembly has appropriated funds for the program.¹²

After approving the application, the SPD must notify the applicant of the approval and enter into discussions with the applicant. The purpose of the discussions is to facilitate the attorney's recruitment to employment as a public defender within a public defender shortage area.¹³

Letter of intent

If the SPD and applicant agree on the applicant's placement within a public defender shortage area, the applicant then signs and delivers to the SPD a letter of intent agreeing to the placement.¹⁴

Participation contract

On the signing of a letter of intent, the attorney and SPD may enter into a contract for the attorney's participation in the program. The attorney's employer also may be a party to the contract.

The contract must include all of the following:

- That the attorney agrees to employment as a public defender in the public defender shortage area identified in the letter of intent for at least three years;
- That the SPD agrees to repay the principal and interest of a government or other educational loan so long as the attorney performs the service obligation and the repayment amount does not exceed the limits established under the bill;

¹¹ R.C. 120.64(B).

¹² R.C. 120.65.

¹³ R.C. 120.65.

¹⁴ R.C. 120.65.

- That the attorney agrees to pay the SPD if the attorney fails to complete the service obligation;
- The extent to which the attorney's teaching activities will be counted toward their employment hours.¹⁵

Public defender shortage areas

Under the bill, the SPD must designate public defender shortage areas in Ohio based on case load relative to public defenders. The designations may apply geographically by county.¹⁶

Rulemaking

The bill requires the SPD to adopt rules as necessary to implement and administer the program.¹⁷ The rules must be adopted in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act.¹⁸

Funds in the state treasury

The bill creates the following funds in the state treasury: the Public Defender Shortage Area Fund and Public Defender Loan Repayment Fund to be used to implement and administer the program. The bill authorizes the SPD to accept gifts of money from any source for the implementation and administration of the program. All gifts must be paid into the treasury to the credit of the Public Defender Shortage Area Fund. All damages collected from program participants who fail to fulfill their service obligations must be paid in the treasury to the credit of the Public Defender Loan Repayment Fund.¹⁹

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	05-21-19

H0005-I-133/ts

¹⁵ R.C. 120.66(B) and (C).

¹⁶ R.C. 120.63.

¹⁷ R.C. 120.68.

¹⁸ R.C. Chapter 119, not in the bill.

¹⁹ R.C. 120.67.