

1 § 2888. VERMONT STRONG SCHOLARS AND INTERNSHIP

2 PROGRAM

3 (a) Program creation.

4 (1) There is created a postsecondary loan forgiveness and internship
5 program designed to forgive a portion of Vermont Student Assistance
6 Corporation loans of students enrolled in majors identified as important to
7 Vermont’s economy and to build internship opportunities for students to gain
8 work experience with Vermont employers.

9 (2) The program shall be known as the Vermont Strong Scholars and
10 Internship Program and will encourage Vermonters to:

11 (A) select majors that prepare them for jobs that are critical to the
12 Vermont economy.

13 (B) enroll and remain enrolled in a Vermont postsecondary
14 institution;

15 (C) live in Vermont upon graduation

16 (D) reduce student loan debt for postsecondary education in targeted
17 fields;

18 (E) provide experiential learning through internship opportunities
19 with Vermont employers; and

20 (F) support a pipeline of qualified talent for employment with
21 Vermont’s employers.

1 (3) VSAC shall administer the loan forgiveness program and a Program
2 Intermediary shall administer the internship program.

3 (b) Loan forgiveness.

4 (1) Academic majors; projections.

5 (A) Annually, on or before November 15, the Secretary of Commerce
6 and Community Development, in consultation with the Vermont State
7 Colleges, the University of Vermont, the Corporation, the Commissioner of
8 Labor, and the Secretary of Education, shall identify eligible postsecondary
9 majors, projecting at least four years into the future, that:

10 (i) are offered by the Vermont State Colleges, the University of
11 Vermont, or Vermont independent colleges; and

12 (ii) lead to jobs the Secretary has identified as critical to the
13 Vermont economy.

14 (B) The Secretary shall prioritize the identified majors and shall
15 select a similar number of associate's degree and bachelor's degree programs.

16 A major shall be identified as eligible for this Program for no less than two
17 years.

18 (C) Based upon the identified majors, the Secretary of Administration
19 shall annually provide the General Assembly with the estimated cost of the
20 Corporation's loan forgiveness awards under the Program during the
21 then-current fiscal year and each of the four following fiscal years.

1 (2) Eligibility. An individual shall be eligible for loan forgiveness under
2 this section if he or she:

3 (A) was classified as a Vermont resident by the eligible institution
4 from which he or she was graduated;

5 (B) is a graduate of an eligible institution;

6 (C) shall not hold a prior bachelor's degree;

7 (D) was awarded an associate's or bachelor's degree in a field
8 identified pursuant to subsection (b) of this section;

9 (E) completed the associate's degree within three years or the
10 bachelor's degree within five years;

11 (F) is employed in Vermont in a field or specific position closely
12 related to the identified degree during the period of loan forgiveness; and

13 (G) is a Vermont resident throughout the period of loan forgiveness.

14 (3) Administration.

15 (A) An eligible individual shall have a portion of his or her
16 postsecondary loan from the Corporation forgiven as follows:

17 (i) for an individual awarded an associate's degree by an eligible
18 institution, in an amount equal to the tuition rate for 15 credits at the
19 Community College of Vermont during the individual's final semester of
20 enrollment, to be prorated over the three years following graduation; and

1 (ii) for an individual awarded a bachelor’s degree by an eligible
2 institution, in an amount equal to the in-state tuition rate at the Vermont State
3 Colleges during the individual’s final year of enrollment, to be prorated over
4 the five years following graduation;

5 (B) Loan forgiveness may be awarded on a prorated basis to an
6 otherwise eligible Vermont resident who transfers to and is graduated from an
7 eligible institution.

8 (4) Management and funding. The Secretary shall develop all
9 organizational details of the Program consistent with the purposes and
10 requirements of this section, including the identification of eligible major
11 programs and eligible jobs. The Secretary may contract with the Corporation
12 for management of the loan forgiveness program. The Secretary may adopt
13 rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 necessary to implement the Program.
14 The availability and payment of loan forgiveness awards under this section are
15 subject to funding available to the Corporation for the awards.

16 (c) Internship Program.

17 (1) Internship program management.

18 (A) The Secretary of Commerce and Community Development and
19 the Commissioner of Labor shall jointly develop and implement the
20 organizational details of the internship program consistent with the purposes
21 and requirements of this section. The Secretary and Commissioner may adopt

1 rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 necessary to implement the internship
2 program.

3 (B) The Commissioner, in consultation with the Secretary, shall issue
4 a request for proposals for a person to serve as a Program Intermediary, who
5 shall perform the duties and responsibilities pursuant to the terms of a
6 performance contract negotiated by the Commissioner and the Intermediary.

7 (C) The Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the
8 Department of Labor, the regional development corporations, and the Program
9 Intermediary, shall have responsibility for building connections within the
10 business community to ensure broad private sector participation in the
11 internship program.

12 (D) The Program Intermediary shall:

13 (i) identify and foster postsecondary internships that are rigorous,
14 productive, well-managed, and mentored;

15 (ii) cultivate relationships with employers, employer-focused
16 organizations, and state and regional government bodies;

17 (iii) build relationships with Vermont postsecondary institutions
18 and facilitate recruitment of students to apply for available internships.

19 (iv) create and maintain a registry of participating employers and
20 associated internship opportunities;

1 (v) coordinate and provide support to the participating student, the
2 employer, and the student’s postsecondary institution;

3 (vi) develop and oversee a participation contract between each
4 student and employer, including terms governing the expectations for the
5 internship, a work plan, mentoring and supervision of the student, reporting by
6 the employer and student, and compensation terms;

7 (vii) carry out any additional activities and duties as directed by
8 the Commissioner.

9 (2) Qualifying internships.

10 (A) Criteria. To qualify for participation in the internship program an
11 internship shall at minimum:

12 (i) be with a Vermont employer as approved by the Program
13 Intermediary in consultation with the Secretary and Commissioner;

14 (ii) pay compensation to an intern of at least the prevailing
15 minimum wage; and

16 (iii) meet the quality standards and expectations as established by
17 the Program Intermediary.

18 (B) Employment of interns. Interns shall be employed by the
19 sponsoring employer except, with the approval of the Commissioner on a case-
20 by-case basis, interns may be employed by the Intermediary and assigned to

1 work with a participating Vermont employer, in which case the sponsoring
2 employer shall contribute funds as determined by the Commissioner.

3 (3) Student eligibility. To participate in the internship program an
4 individual shall be:

5 (A) a Vermont resident enrolled in a post-secondary institution in or
6 outside of Vermont; or

7 (B) a Vermont resident who was graduated from a post-secondary
8 institution within 24 months of entering the program.

9 (d) Funding.

10 (1) There is created a special fund to be known as the Vermont Strong
11 Scholars Fund pursuant to 32 V.S.A. chapter 7, subchapter 5. The Fund shall
12 be used and administered solely for the purposes of this section. The Secretary
13 of Commerce and Community Development may draw warrants for
14 disbursements from the Fund in anticipation of receipts. Any remaining
15 balance at the end of the fiscal year shall be carried forward in the Fund.

16 (2) The Fund shall consist of sums to be identified by the Secretary from
17 any source accepted for the benefit of the Fund and interest earned from the
18 investment of Fund balances.

19 (3) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the
20 Commissioner of Labor shall have the authority to use funds allocated to the

1 Workforce Education and Training Fund established in 10 V.S.A. § 543 to
2 implement the internship program created in this section.

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