

§ 17C-22. North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Program established; administration.

(a) Program. – There is established the North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Program to be administered by the Committee with the assistance of the Division. The purpose of the Program is to increase the number of criminal justice professionals by providing forgivable loans to exceptional individuals to obtain Applied Associate Degrees in Criminal Justice or other Committee-approved related fields of study as preparation to enter a criminal justice profession.

(b) Program Administrator. – The Director of the Division shall select a member of the Division staff, with the consent of the Committee, to serve as the Program administrator. The Program administrator will be responsible for all administrative duties and oversight of the Program as established by the Committee. The Program administrator will conduct recruitment efforts to include the following:

- (1) Target eligible counties.
- (2) Target high school graduates who, due to economic circumstances, are displaced, unemployed, or underemployed.
- (3) Target high school seniors who demonstrate an interest in being employed in an eligible criminal justice profession.
- (4) Engage with employees of eligible criminal justice professions and leaders in eligible counties for input in the Program.
- (5) Attend high school career days, job fairs, and other activities to recruit qualified individuals into the Program.

(c) Awards of Forgivable Loans. – The Program shall provide forgivable loans of up to three thousand one hundred fifty-two dollars (\$3,152.00) per year for up to two years to selected individuals. The funds from the forgivable loans may be used for tuition, fees, and the cost of books. The Committee may determine the maximum amount of loan proceeds that may be applied to community college fees and course textbooks. The number of forgivable loans awarded annually shall not exceed 100 and the total number of recipients in the Program each year shall not exceed 200. The Committee shall select recipients no later than June 1 of each year.

(d) Eligibility Criteria. – An applicant must be domiciled in this State at the time of application, a resident for tuition purposes as defined in G.S. 116-143.1(a)(2), a high school graduate or a high school senior who will graduate from high school by the end of the current academic year, and demonstrate the intent upon completion of the Program to be employed in an eligible criminal justice profession in an eligible county. An applicant who has been convicted of any of the following is ineligible to receive a forgivable loan:

- (1) A felony.
- (2) A crime for which the punishment could have been imprisonment for more than two years.
- (3) A crime or unlawful act defined as a Class B misdemeanor within the five-year period prior to the date of application.
- (4) Four or more crimes or unlawful acts defined as Class A misdemeanors, except the trainee may be enrolled if the last conviction date occurred more than two years prior to the date of application.
- (5) A combination of four or more Class A misdemeanors or Class B misdemeanors regardless of the date of conviction.

(e) Application Process. – The Committee may specify required application materials, including a certified State and local background check for applicants who are at least 18 years of age. Application materials and Committee deliberations are confidential and are not a public record as defined in G.S. 132-1. The Committee shall publish application, award, and notification deadlines and provide written notification to applicants regarding the outcome of the Committee's deliberations.

(f) Award of Forgivable Loan. – The Committee shall adopt standards for awarding forgivable loans based on measures the Committee deems appropriate, including the following, and the selection of recipients by the Committee shall be final:

- (1) Scholastic Profile as determined by SAT or ACT scores, grade point average, and class rank when available.
- (2) Potential for excellence in an eligible criminal justice profession.
- (3) School and community service.
- (4) At least two references.
- (5) Demonstrated writing ability.

(g) Administration of Forgivable Loan Awards. – Upon the naming of recipients by the Committee, the Division shall perform all administrative functions necessary to implement this Article, which functions shall include dissemination of information, disbursement, receipt, liaison with participating community colleges, determination of the acceptability of service repayment agreements, and all other functions necessary for the execution, payment, and enforcement of promissory notes required under this Article.

(h) Recipient Obligations. – A recipient must become and remain a full-time student at a North Carolina community college in an Applied Associate Degree in Criminal Justice or in a Committee-approved related field of study at all times during each of the recipient's two academic years of community college study and pursue continuously studies that will qualify the recipient to be employed in an eligible criminal justice profession upon graduation. The recipient must maintain a minimum cumulative 2.0 GPA throughout the course of study and also maintain appropriate credit hours for each semester to obtain an Applied Associate Degree in Criminal Justice or Committee-approved field of study within two years. The recipient must also accept employment in an eligible county in an eligible criminal justice profession for at least four out of five years following graduation. The Committee may adopt additional recipient obligations it deems appropriate.

(i) Annual Report. – The Program administrator, in coordination with the Committee, shall report no later than January 1, 2020, and annually thereafter, to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety regarding the following:

- (1) The number of forgivable loans awarded for each academic year disaggregated to include geographic and other demographic information.
- (2) Aggregated student performance, retention, and graduation rates.
- (3) Employment subsequent to completion of the Program broken down by eligible county and eligible criminal justice profession.
- (4) Forgiveness, termination, default, and repayment rates.
- (5) Retention rates of recipients within eligible criminal justice professions disaggregated by eligible county. (2018-5, s. 17.1(b); 2021-180, s. 18.6(b).)