

AN ACT concerning veterans.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Veterans' Home Nurses' Loan Repayment Act.

Section 5. Nurse Loan Repayment Program. There is created, beginning July 1, 2007, the Nurse Loan Repayment Program to be administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission in consultation with the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The program shall provide assistance, subject to appropriation, to eligible nurses.

Section 10. Award; maximum time period; maximum amount. Subject to appropriation, the Commission shall award a grant to each applicant who qualifies under this Act. An individual may receive a grant under this Act each year for up to 4 years. The amount of this grant may not exceed \$5,000 per recipient per year. The Commission shall require the recipient of a grant awarded under the program to use the grant award for payment of the recipient's educational loan.

Section 15. Application. All applications for grant assistance under the program must be made to the Commission in

a form and manner prescribed by the Commission. Applicants shall also submit any supporting documents deemed necessary by the Commission at the time of application.

Section 20. Eligibility.

(a) The Commission shall, on an annual basis, receive and consider applications for grant assistance under the program. An applicant is eligible for a grant under the program if the Commission finds that the applicant:

- (1) is a United States citizen or permanent resident;
- (2) is a resident of Illinois;
- (3) is working as a registered professional nurse or licensed practical nurse in a State veterans' home;
- (4) is a borrower with an outstanding balance due on an educational loan; and
- (5) has not defaulted on an educational loan.

(b) Preference may be given to previous recipients of a grant under the program, provided that the recipient continues to meet the eligibility requirements set forth in this Section.

(c) For each year during which an individual receives a grant under this program, he or she must fulfill a separate 12-month period as a registered professional nurse or licensed practical nurse in a State veterans' home.

Section 900. The Department of Veterans Affairs Act is amended by adding Sections 8 and 9 as follows:

(20 ILCS 2805/8 new)

Sec. 8. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Outpatient Counseling Program. Subject to appropriations for that purpose, the Department, in consultation with the Department of Human Services, shall contract with professional counseling specialists to provide a range of confidential counseling and direct treatment services to war-affected Southwest Asia combat veterans and their family members, and to provide additional treatment services to Viet Nam War veterans for post-traumatic stress disorder, particularly those Viet Nam veterans whose post-traumatic stress disorder has intensified or initially emerged due to the war in the Middle East. Any such contracts entered into by the Department must be with individuals and entities pre-approved by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and must be for the provision of services pre-approved by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In consultation with the Department of Human Services, the Department shall:

(1) develop an educational program designed to inform and train primary health care professionals, including mental health professionals, about the effects of war-related stress and trauma;

(2) provide informational and counseling services for the purpose of establishing and fostering peer-support networks throughout the State for families of deployed

members of the reserves and the Illinois National Guard;
and

(3) provide for veterans' families a referral network
of mental health providers who are skilled in treating
deployment stress, combat stress, and post-traumatic
stress.

As used in this Section, "Southwest Asia combat veteran"
means an Illinois resident who is, or who was honorably
discharged as, a member of the Armed Forces of the United
States, a member of the Illinois National Guard, or a member of
any reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States
and who served on active duty in connection with Operation
Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, or Operation Iraqi
Freedom.

(20 ILCS 2805/9 new)

Sec. 9. Veterans Conservation Corps. Subject to
appropriations for that purpose, the Department shall create a
list of honorably discharged veterans, particularly those with
post-traumatic stress disorder and related conditions, who are
interested in working on a volunteer basis on projects that
restore Illinois' natural habitat. The list is referred to as
the Veterans Conservation Corps. The Department shall promote
the opportunity to volunteer for the Veterans Conservation
Corps through its field offices and through cooperating
veterans organizations. Only veterans who grant their approval

may be included on the list. The Department shall consult with the Department of Natural Resources to determine the most effective way to market the Veterans Conservation Corps to State agencies and local governmental or not-for-profit sponsors of habitat restoration projects.

Section 999. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon becoming law.