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## DIGEST

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Hunter

HB No. 997

**Abstract:** Authorizes use of TOPS awards for postgraduate study in certain circumstances; requires recipients of TOPS awards to (1) pursue a field of study that will qualify the recipient for employment in certain categories of jobs, (2) repay awards unless the recipient completes a bachelor's or postgraduate degree and resides in La. for at least one year for each year of award received.

### Continuing Eligibility for Award

Present law requires that a recipient of a Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) award meet certain criteria in order to maintain continued receipt of such award. Such criteria include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Earning enough credits to maintain full-time status as a student.
- (2) Maintain a minimum required grade point average, depending on the type of award received.
- (3) Have no criminal conviction, except for misdemeanor traffic violations.

Proposed law adds a requirement that the student pursue a degree or skill or occupational training that would qualify him for employment in a four or five star job, on a statewide basis, as defined by the Louisiana Workforce Commission. Further provides that a student shall remain eligible for an award if all other conditions of present law are met and if after the student enrolls in but before he completes the program of study such job is no longer defined as a four or five star job.

### Awards for Postgraduate Study

Proposed law provides that an otherwise qualified student who meets each of the following conditions may use the TOPS award to pursue a postgraduate academic degree at an eligible La. institution:

- (1) The student meets the initial eligibility requirements for an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors award.
- (2) The student first enrolled as a postsecondary student in and graduated from an out-of-state college or university accredited by a regional accrediting organization

recognized by the U.S. Dept. of Education.

- (3) While enrolled in such a college or university, the student met all requirements for continuation of the initial award that would have been applicable had he been enrolled in a La. college or university.
- (4) The student graduated from high school during the 2010-2011 school year or thereafter.

Provides that the amount of the tuition award shall not exceed the amounts determined by the administering agency to equal the tuition charged for the postgraduate study or for undergraduate full-time enrollment charged by the highest cost public college or university in the state, whichever is less.

Provides that the student may continue to receive the award if he continues to meet all academic and other requirements for continued receipt of the award as applicable to an undergraduate, including any modifications of such requirements made by the administering agency as needed to apply such requirements to postgraduate study.

Permits student to receive the award for not more than three academic years or the equivalent number of semesters or quarters; prohibits receipt of the award for a term that begins more than seven years after high school graduation.

#### Repayment of Award Amounts

Proposed law provides that for an award recipient first enrolling in an eligible institution for or during the 2014-2015 academic year or thereafter, upon completion of a bachelor's or postgraduate degree, such former recipient of an award shall either reside in La for at least one year for each year of award he received or repay one year of award for each year he fails to meet this residency requirement. Requires any such recipient who loses eligibility to receive awards to repay amounts received.

Proposed law requires that the former recipient repay amounts in the reverse order from that in which they were received and repay one year of awards within each calendar year until all awards have been repaid. Authorizes deferral of repayment for full-time students and those engaged in military service. Waives the repayment requirement for a recipient who completes a degree and works for at least four years in any of the following: government service including military service; for a La.-based company; or for a nonprofit organization.

Proposed law authorizes the administering agency to promulgate rules necessary to implement proposed law, including provision for collecting amounts owed and interest on unpaid amounts.

(Adds R.S. 17:3048.1(A)(4)(f), (Y), and (Z))