

Article 2.

North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Program.

§ 17C-20. Definitions.

As used in this Article, the following definitions apply:

- (1) Commission. – The North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission.
- (2) Committee. – The North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Committee.
- (3) Community college. – As defined in G.S. 115D-2(2).
- (4) Division. – The Criminal Justice Standards Division of the North Carolina Department of Justice.
- (5) Eligible county. – A county with a population of less than 200,000 according to the latest federal decennial census.
- (6) Eligible criminal justice professions. – State and local sworn law enforcement officers, State correctional officers, other correctional officers maintained by local governments and juvenile justice agencies, sworn sheriffs and deputy sheriffs, detention officers, and telecommunicators under the direct supervision of a law enforcement agency.
- (7) Program. – The North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Program.
- (8) Recipient. – An individual selected by the Committee to receive a forgivable loan under the Program. (2018-5, s. 17.1(b); 2020-78, s. 11.1(a); 2021-180, s. 18.6(a).)

§ 17C-21. North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Committee established; membership.

(a) Committee Established. – There is established the North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Committee. The Committee shall be a Special Committee of the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission, as defined in the Commission's bylaws. The Committee shall determine program and forgivable loan recipient selection criteria, selection procedures, and shall select the recipients to receive forgivable loans under the North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Program in accordance with the requirements of this Article.

(b) Membership. – The Committee shall consist of 10 members who shall be appointed as follows:

- (1) The chair of the Commission shall appoint eight members of the Commission to the Committee as follows:
 - a. Three at-large members.
 - b. Two sworn law enforcement officers.
 - c. Two correctional officers.
 - d. The ex officio member representing the President of The North Carolina Community College System.
- (2) The chair of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission shall appoint two members of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission to the Committee.

(c) Terms of Office. – Appointments to the Committee shall be for two-year terms, commencing July 1, 2018.

(d) Chair; Meetings. – The chair of the Commission shall call the first meeting of the Committee. The Committee members shall elect a chair and a vice-chair from the membership of the Committee pursuant to the Commission's bylaws to serve one-year terms. The Committee shall

meet regularly at times and places deemed necessary by the chair or, in the absence of the chair, by the vice-chair.

(e) Expenses. – Committee members shall receive per diem, subsistence, and travel allowances in accordance with G.S. 138-5 or G.S. 138-6, as appropriate.

(f) Vacancies. – Except as otherwise provided, if a vacancy occurs in the membership of the Committee, the appointing authority shall appoint another person meeting the same qualifications to serve for the balance of the unexpired term. (2018-5, s. 17.1(b).)

§ 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).)

§ 17C-23. Terms of forgivable loans; receipt and disbursement of funds; default.

(a) Forgivable Loans. – All forgivable loans shall be evidenced by notes made payable to the Program that bear interest at a rate not to exceed ten percent (10%) per year as set by the Committee and beginning on the first day of September after the completion of the Program or 60 days after termination of the forgivable loan, whichever is earlier. The forgivable loan may be terminated upon the recipient's withdrawal from school, by the recipient's failure to meet the standards set by the Committee, or by the recipient's default based on conditions set by the Committee. The Committee may only disburse funds to the community college where the recipient is enrolled and may not disburse funds directly to a recipient.

(b) Forgiveness. – The Committee shall forgive the loan and any interest accrued on the loan if, within five years after obtaining an Applied Associate Degree in Criminal Justice or Committee-approved field of study, the recipient is employed on a full-time basis for a period of at least four years in an eligible county in an eligible criminal justice profession. The recipient shall provide the Committee within 60 days of completion of the Program verification of the recipient's intent to seek employment in an eligible criminal justice profession in an eligible county. The recipient shall provide verification of employment to the Committee each year until the obligation is satisfied. The Committee shall also forgive the loan if it finds that it is impossible for the recipient to meet the terms of the loan, after or before graduation, due to death or permanent disability of the recipient.

(c) Extension. – The Committee may extend repayment of the loan for up to two years on a year-to-year basis for each year if (i) the recipient is on active duty with the Armed Forces of the United States or (ii) the Committee, in its sole discretion, determines that circumstances warrant an extension.

(d) Repayment. – If the recipient notifies the Committee that the recipient intends to forego forgiveness of the loan after completion of the Program, the Committee shall provide the recipient with the conditions of repayment and the recipient will have 60 days to begin repayment of all funds distributed, including interest. The recipient will have up to 60 months to repay all funds distributed, including interest.

(e) Default. – The Committee shall determine the events that constitute a default during the Program, including, but not limited to, failure by the recipient to comply with the obligations set out in G.S. 17C-22(h). In the event of default during the Program, the Committee may declare the entire unpaid amount of indebtedness evidenced by the note, including interest, immediately due and payable. A default shall preclude further participation by the recipient in the Program. Upon default, the Committee shall notify the recipient, in writing, by certified mail, return receipt requested, addressed to the recipient at the last address on file with the Committee. Refusal or nondelivery at that address will be deemed delivered after seven days. The Committee may allow a recipient who is in default to repay all funds distributed, including interest. If the Committee approves repayment, the recipient will receive the conditions of repayment and will have 60 days to begin repayment of all funds distributed, including interest. The recipient will have up to 60 months to repay all funds distributed, including interest. (2018-5, s. 17.1(b); 2021-180, s. 18.6(c).)