

Senate Bill 20

By: Senators Kirkpatrick of the 32nd, Summers of the 13th, Payne of the 54th, Anderson of the 24th and Parent of the 44th

**AS PASSED**

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

1 To amend Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,  
2 relating to scholarships, loans, and grants, so as to provide for tuition grants to children and  
3 spouses of certain public employees killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty; to  
4 provide for charitable contributions to the Georgia Student Finance Authority for such grants;  
5 to expand eligibility for the Public Safety Memorial Grant to provide for tuition grants to  
6 children and spouses of emergency medical technicians, firefighters, highway emergency  
7 response operators, law enforcement officers, and prison guards who are killed or  
8 permanently disabled in the line of duty; to provide for tuition grants to children and spouses  
9 of public school employees and public school teachers who are killed or permanently  
10 disabled by an act of violence in the line of duty; to provide definitions; to provide for  
11 maximum grant amounts; to provide for eligibility; to provide for an application process; to  
12 provide for grant renewals; to provide for the purchase of loans made to students for  
13 educational purposes for veterinarians who practice shelter medicine and veterinarians who  
14 practice in nonprofit pet sterilization clinics; to provide for the appointment of additional  
15 members to the State Veterinary Education Board; to authorize the State Veterinary  
16 Education Board to establish committees; to provide for definitions; to require the State  
17 Veterinary Education Board to establish and maintain separate programs for loan purchases  
18 made under this part and loan purchases made under Part 6B of this article and account

separately for the funding of each program; to provide requirements for participation in the loan repayment program; to provide for maximum total and annual repayment amounts; to provide for terms for repayment agreements; to provide for rules and regulations; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

**PART I**

**SECTION 1-1.**

Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to scholarships, loans, and grants, is amended in Part 3, relating to the Georgia Student Finance Authority, by revising Code Section 20-3-316.2, relating to voluntary donations through state income tax returns and drivers' license fees benefitting children of certain public servants seeking postsecondary education, as follows:

"20-3-316.2.

(a)(1) Each Georgia income tax return form for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, ~~2017~~ 2026, shall contain appropriate language, to be determined by the state revenue commissioner, offering the taxpayer the opportunity to make a charitable contribution to the Georgia Student Finance Authority to provide financial assistance toward the postsecondary educational costs of the children and spouses of law enforcement officers, firefighters, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, and prison guards employed by the state or other public employer; and Highway Emergency Response Operators of the Department of Transportation who were permanently disabled or killed in the line of duty and the children and spouses of public school employees and public school teachers who were killed or permanently disabled by an act of violence in the line of duty by either donating all or any part of any tax refund due and authorizing

a reduction in the refund check otherwise payable or contributing any amount over and above any amount of tax owed by adding that amount to the taxpayer's payment. The instructions accompanying the income tax return shall include a description of the intended use of the moneys received from the contributions. Each taxpayer required to file a state income tax return who desires to make a charitable contribution to the Georgia Student Finance Authority may designate such contribution as provided on the appropriate income tax return form.

(2) The Department of Revenue shall determine annually the total amount so contributed and shall transmit such amount to the Georgia Student Finance Authority.

(b) Beginning January 1, ~~2017~~ 2026, the Department of Driver Services shall, through appropriate language on its forms for the issuance and renewal of drivers' licenses and identification cards, offer individuals the opportunity to make a voluntary charitable contribution of \$1.00, \$5.00, or \$10.00 to the Georgia Student Finance Authority to provide financial assistance toward the postsecondary educational costs of the children and spouses of law enforcement officers, firefighters, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, and prison guards employed by the state or other public employer; and Highway Emergency Response Operators of the Department of Transportation who were permanently disabled or killed in the line of duty and the children and spouses of public school employees and public school teachers who were killed or permanently disabled by an act of violence in the line of duty. The form shall contain a description of the intended use of moneys received from the contributions. Each individual who desires to make a charitable contribution may designate such contribution on the appropriate form, and the Department of Driver Services shall accept such contribution. The Department of Driver Services shall determine annually the total amount so contributed, shall withhold therefrom a reasonable amount for administering this voluntary charitable contribution program, and shall transmit the balance to the Georgia Student Finance Authority for funding, in whole or in part, the postsecondary educational costs of such students. If, in any tax year, the administrative

costs of the Department of Driver Services for collecting charitable contributions pursuant to this subsection exceed the sum of such contributions, the administrative costs which the Department of Driver Services is authorized to withhold from such contributions shall not exceed the sum of such contributions."

## PART II

### SECTION 2-1.

Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to scholarships, loans, and grants, is amended in Subpart 7 of Part 3, relating to grants to children of law enforcement officers, firefighters, and prison guards, by revising Code Section 20-3-450, relating to legislative findings and purpose of subpart, as follows:

"20-3-450.

The General Assembly finds that certain citizens are called upon to enforce the criminal laws of this state and to protect persons and properties within the state and that they provide a valuable and vital public service to the state and to citizens and properties within the state at a great personal sacrifice and risk to their own lives and well-being. The purpose of the General Assembly, as provided for in this subpart, is to enable the authority to provide educational grant assistance to the children and spouses of such persons who are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty."

### SECTION 2-2.

Said article is further amended by revising Code Section 20-3-451, relating to definitions, as follows:

"20-3-451.

As used in this subpart, the term:

(1) 'Academic year' means a period of time, typically nine months, in which a full-time student is expected to complete the equivalent of at least ~~two semesters' or three quarters'~~ academic work nine or more credit hours per term or semester or in which a part-time student is expected to complete the equivalent of eight or fewer credit hours per term or semester.

(2) 'Approved school' ~~means the same schools as enumerated in Code Section 20-3-391 relative to the state student incentive grant program~~ shall have the same meaning as the term 'eligible postsecondary institution' as set forth in Code Section 20-3-519.

(3) 'Eligible student' means a person who qualifies for an educational grant under this subpart.

(4) 'Emergency medical technician' means a person employed by the state or by a county, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state who has been certified as an emergency medical technician, cardiac technician, or paramedic pursuant to Chapter 11 of Title 31.

(5) 'Firefighter' means a person employed, appointed, or regularly enrolled by the state or by any county or municipal fire department whose duties include extinguishing fires or investigating cases of suspected arson.

(6) 'Highway emergency response operator' means an individual employed by the Department of Transportation who operates a towing or recovery vehicle or highway maintenance vehicle.

(7) 'In the line of duty' means:

(A) With respect to an emergency medical technician, when performing services for and receiving compensation from the public agency which employs such emergency medical technician or when performing emergency medical services;

(B) With respect to a firefighter, when responding to or returning from a fire or other emergency, performing duties during any fire or other emergency, or performing duties

intended to protect life and property, including, without limitation, actual participation in a training exercise;

(C) With respect to a highway emergency response operator, when performing services for and receiving compensation from the Department of Transportation;

(D) With respect to a law enforcement officer, when performing services for the law enforcement agency which employs such officer, responding to any situation which would save a life or preserve the peace, or preventing or attempting to prevent the commission of a crime; or

(E) With respect to a prison guard, when performing services for and receiving compensation from the public agency which employs such prison guard.

~~(4)~~(8) 'Law enforcement officer' means a sheriff, deputy sheriff, police officer, ~~policeman~~, peace officer, officer or member of the Department of Public Safety, or other officer or official who has the power of arrest and who is responsible for enforcing the criminal laws of the state or its political subdivisions.

~~(5)~~(9) 'Permanent disability' or 'permanently disabled' means physical incapacity to perform the duties of a law enforcement officer, firefighter, ~~or~~ prison guard, emergency medical technician, or highway emergency response operator as determined by the public employer designated in paragraph (3) of Code Section 20-3-453, provided that such incapacity is likely to be permanent based upon current medical standards.

~~(6)~~(10) 'Prison guard' means a person employed by the state or by a county, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state whose principal duties relate to supervision and incarceration of persons accused or convicted of violation of the criminal laws of the state or any county, municipality, or other political subdivision thereof."

### **SECTION 2-3.**

Said article is further amended by revising Code Section 20-3-452, relating to amount of grants to each eligible student, as follows:

"20-3-452.

There is granted to each eligible student attending an approved school the sum of ~~\$2,000.00~~ no more than \$18,000.00 per academic year. No person shall be eligible to receive grant assistance provided under this subpart in excess of ~~\$8,000.00~~ \$72,000.00. Grant assistance to eligible students under this subpart shall be payable during the period of a summer school quarter or semester. The payment of grants to eligible students under this subpart shall be contingent upon the appropriation of funds by the General Assembly for the purposes of this subpart in annual appropriations Acts of the General Assembly."

#### SECTION 2-4.

Said article is further amended by revising Code Section 20-3-453, relating to eligibility of students, as follows:

"20-3-453.

No grants shall be payable to any person under this subpart who fails to meet any of the following qualifications or restrictions:

(1) Such person ~~must~~ shall be the child, either natural or adopted, or the spouse of a law enforcement officer, firefighter, ~~or~~ prison guard, emergency medical technician, or highway emergency response operator who has been permanently disabled or killed in the line of duty or while performing the duties to which he or she was assigned ~~in the normal course of employment~~. If such person is the adopted child of any such law enforcement officer, firefighter, ~~or~~ prison guard, emergency medical technician, or highway emergency response operator, such person ~~must~~ shall have been adopted and any final order of adoption issued prior to the date of the accident or event causing the death or permanent disability of such parent;

(2) Such person ~~must~~ shall have been a citizen of this state for a period of at least 12 months immediately prior to the date of registration in an approved school and ~~must~~ shall remain a citizen of ~~the~~ this state while receiving funds under this subpart;

(3) The ~~deceased or disabled law enforcement officer, firefighter, or prison guard~~ parent or spouse of such person ~~must~~ shall have been ~~an employee, either full-time or part-time, or an officer or official, whether elected or appointed, of~~ employed, appointed, or regularly enrolled by this state or any county, municipality, department, board, bureau, branch, agency, commission, authority, or political subdivision of the state on the date of the accident or event from which death or permanent disability resulted; and

(4) Any person otherwise meeting the conditions of this subpart shall be eligible to receive a grant even though the accident or the event causing the death or disability of such person's parent or spouse occurred prior to July 1, ~~1980~~ 2025."

#### SECTION 2-5.

Said article is further amended by revising Code Section 20-3-455, relating to administration of program and physical examinations, as follows:

"20-3-455.

The authority is authorized to prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary or convenient for administration of this program and to establish procedures for determination of eligibility of applicants. The authority is also authorized to establish standards and procedures for verifying the death or permanent disability of the applicant's parent or spouse and for such purpose is authorized to require a physical examination and to pay for the cost of such examination from funds appropriated for use by the authority for the purposes of this subpart."



**PART III**  
**SECTION 3-1.**

Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to scholarships, loans, and grants, is amended in Part 3, relating to the Georgia Student Finance Authority, by adding a new subpart to read as follows:

"Subpart 7C

20-3-466.

(a) As used in this Code section, the term:

(1) 'Academic year' means a period of time, typically nine months, in which a full-time student is expected to complete the equivalent of at least nine or more credit hours per term or semester or in which a part-time student is expected to complete the equivalent of eight or fewer credit hours per term or semester.

(2) 'Act of violence' means a willful act of violence.

(3) 'Approved school' shall have the same meaning as the term 'eligible postsecondary institution' as set forth in Code Section 20-3-519.

(4) 'Authority' means the Georgia Student Finance Authority.

(5) 'Eligible student' means a person who qualifies for an educational grant under this Code section.

(6) 'In the line of duty' means while on duty and performing services for and receiving compensation from the local education agency which employs such public school teacher or public school employee.

(7) 'Local education agency' shall have the same meaning as set forth in subsection (a) of Code Section 20-2-167.1.

(8) 'Permanent disability' means disability due to:

(A) Loss of both eyes or blindness in both eyes with only light perception;

(B) Loss or loss of use of both hands;

(C) Loss or loss of use of both legs;

(D) Loss of a lower extremity or residuals of organic disease or injury which so affect the functions of balance or propulsion as to preclude locomotion without resort to a wheelchair; or

(E) Organic brain damage resulting from direct physical trauma incurred after July 1, 2001, which so affects the mental capacity as to preclude the ability to function productively in any employment.

(9) 'Public school employee' shall have the same meaning as set forth in Code Section 20-2-910.

(10) 'Public school teacher' shall have the same meaning as set forth in Code Section 20-2-880.

(b) There is granted to each eligible student attending an approved school the sum of no more than \$18,000.00 per academic year. No person shall be eligible to receive grant assistance provided under this Code section in excess of \$72,000.00. Grant assistance to eligible students under this Code section shall be payable during the period of a summer school quarter or semester. The payment of grants to eligible students under this Code section shall be contingent upon the appropriation of funds by the General Assembly for the purposes of this Code section in annual appropriations Acts of the General Assembly.

(c) No grants shall be payable to any person under this Code section who fails to meet any of the following qualifications or restrictions:

(1) Such person shall be the child, either natural or adopted, or the spouse of a public school teacher or public school employee who has been killed by an act of violence in the line of duty or who has a permanent disability due to an act of violence in the line of duty. If such person is the adopted child of any such public school teacher or public school

employee, such person shall have been adopted and any final order of adoption issued prior to the act of violence causing the death or permanent disability of such parent;

(2) Such person shall have been a citizen of this state for a period of at least 12 months immediately prior to the date of registration in an approved school and shall remain a citizen of this state while receiving funds under this Code section;

(3) The parent or spouse of such person shall have been a public school employee or public school teacher on the date of the act of violence from which death or permanent disability resulted; and

(4) Any person otherwise meeting the conditions of this Code section shall be eligible to receive a grant even though the act of violence causing the death or permanent disability of such person's parent or spouse occurred prior to July 1, 2025.

(d) Any person meeting the conditions of this Code section may apply to the authority for a grant. Such application shall be submitted in writing on forms prescribed by the authority for such purpose. The applicant shall furnish such information as may be required by the authority for determination of eligibility for the grant. The authority shall approve grant renewals only upon receipt of the recipient's application therefor and upon a finding that the recipient has successfully completed the work of the preceding school period and presents evidence that he or she is a student in good standing, that he or she remains a citizen of this state, and that he or she remains otherwise qualified to receive such grant under this Code section.

(e) The authority is authorized to prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary or convenient for administration of this Code section and to establish procedures for determination of eligibility of applicants. The authority is also authorized to establish standards and procedures for verifying the death or permanent disability of the applicant's parent or spouse and for such purpose is authorized to require a physical examination and to pay for the cost of such examination from funds appropriated for use by the authority for the purposes of this Code section."

**PART IV**  
**SECTION 4-1.**

Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to scholarships, loans, and grants, is amended by revising Code Section 20-3-518.1, relating to definitions relative to state veterinary education, as follows:

"20-3-518.1.

As used in this part, the term:

(1) 'Animal shelter,' 'nonprofit pet sterilization clinic,' 'pet sterilization services,' and 'shelter medicine' shall have the same meanings as set forth in Code Section 20-3-518.8.

(2) 'Board' means the State Veterinary Education Board created under Code Section 20-3-518.2.

~~(2)~~(3) 'Commissioner' means the Commissioner of Agriculture.

~~(3)~~(4) 'Department' means the Department of Agriculture."

**SECTION 4-2.**

Said article is further amended by revising Code Section 20-3-518.2, relating to State Veterinarian Education Board, as follows:

"20-3-518.2.

(a) There shall be a State Veterinary Education Board which shall consist of:

(1) The Commissioner of Agriculture or his or her designee;

(2) The dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Georgia or his or her designee;

(3) The dean of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences of the University of Georgia or his or her designee;

(4) A person actively engaged in the production of livestock in this state, to be appointed by the Governor, who shall serve for a term of four years and until his or her successor

is qualified and appointed. The term of the initial member appointed under this paragraph shall commence on July 1, 2011; and

(5) A person actively engaged in the private practice of veterinary medicine in this state, whose practice includes but is not necessarily limited to food animals, to be appointed by the State Board of Veterinary Medicine, who shall serve for a term of four years and until his or her successor is qualified and appointed. The term of the initial member appointed under this paragraph shall commence on July 1, 2011;

(6) A person employed as an executive director or equivalent of an animal shelter or a nonprofit pet sterilization clinic in this state, to be appointed by the Governor, who shall serve for a term of four years and until his or her successor is qualified and appointed. The term of the initial member appointed under this paragraph shall commence on January 1, 2026; and

(7) A veterinarian employed full time in the practice of shelter medicine or pet sterilization services in this state, to be appointed by the Governor, who shall serve for a term of four years and until his or her successor is qualified and appointed. The term of the initial member appointed under this paragraph shall commence on January 1, 2026.

(b) Any vacancies on the board shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

(c)(1) The board shall elect annually a chairperson and a vice chairperson to serve in the absence or inability of the chairperson. The board shall meet at least once each year at such time and place as may be fixed by the board. Special meetings shall be held upon the call of the chairperson. ~~Three~~ A majority of the members of the board shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. ~~No~~ Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, no official action shall be taken by the board except upon the affirmative vote of at least ~~three~~ a majority of the members of the board.

(2)(A) The board shall be authorized to establish a committee, consisting of two or more members of the board, which, to the extent provided by the board, shall have and

exercise the authority of the board in regard to the loan purchases provided for in this part.

(B) The board shall be authorized to establish a committee which, to the extent provided by the board, shall have and exercise the authority of the board in regard to the loan purchases provided for in Part 6B of this article.

(d) The board shall be attached to the Department of Agriculture for administrative purposes only, pursuant to Code Section 50-4-3.

(e) The board shall establish and maintain separate programs for loan purchases made under this part and loan purchases made under Part 6B of this article and shall account separately for the funding of each program. Any state appropriation of funds shall separately identify the amount of funds appropriated for each program."

#### **SECTION 4-3.**

Said article is further amended by adding a new part to read as follows:

#### "Part 6B

20-3-518.8.

As used in this part, the term:

(1) 'Animal shelter' shall have the same meaning as set forth in Code Section 4-11-2.

(2) 'Board' means the State Veterinary Education Board created under Code Section 20-3-518.2.

(3) 'Nonprofit organization' means an organization which is exempt from taxation under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

(4) 'Nonprofit pet sterilization clinic' means a veterinary facility that exclusively offers pet sterilization services and which is a nonprofit organization.

(5) 'Pet sterilization services' means procedures that meet or exceed veterinary medical standards of care in providing sterilization of dogs, cats, and pet rabbits.

(6) 'Shelter medicine' means veterinary practices used to manage the health of populations of animals handled by animal shelters.

(7) 'Veterinary facility' shall have the same meaning as set forth in Code Section 43-50-3.

20-3-518.9.

(a) Beginning January 1, 2026, the board may provide for the purchase of loans made to students for educational purposes who have completed a program of study in the field of doctor of veterinary medicine or its equivalent and are authorized to practice veterinary medicine in this state and are residents of this state, with services in the form of the practice of veterinary medicine while residing in this state to be rendered as consideration for such loan purchases.

(b) Only persons who have been practicing veterinary medicine for ten years or less shall be eligible for loan purchases under this part.

(c) Only persons who practice shelter medicine full time or who practice full time at a nonprofit pet sterilization clinic shall be eligible for loan purchases under this part.

(d) For eligible applicants who practice shelter medicine full time, the board shall give priority to applicants whose practices include pet sterilization services.

20-3-518.10.

(a)(1) Subject to appropriations, persons whose applications are approved and enter into a loan purchase agreement with the board, as provided by Code Section 20-3-518.9, shall receive a loan purchase in a total amount to be determined by the board, but not exceeding \$75,000.00 per person. The loan purchases shall be paid in such manner as the board shall determine.

(2) The loan purchases to be granted to each applicant shall be based upon the condition that the consideration for such loan purchases shall be services to be rendered by the applicant after entering into a loan purchase agreement with the board by practicing his or her profession full time in a board approved animal shelter or nonprofit pet sterilization clinic.

(3) For time served after entering into a loan purchase agreement with the board in practicing his or her profession full time in an animal shelter or nonprofit pet sterilization clinic, the applicant shall receive a loan purchase at a rate equivalent to \$25,000.00 per 12 months of service; provided, however, that the total purchase amount shall not exceed the maximum specified in paragraph (1) of this subsection.

(b) The board shall not enter into new loan purchase agreements with more than four persons per year for shelter medicine or nonprofit pet sterilization services; provided, however, that the total sum of loan purchases from state appropriations for which the board contractually obligates itself in any fiscal year shall not exceed the amount of funds for such loan purchase agreements specified in annual appropriations Acts. Funds in the loan purchase fund account that are not expended or contractually obligated by the board for loan purchases during any fiscal year shall lapse.

20-3-518.11.

(a) Before being granted a loan purchase, each applicant shall enter into a contract with the board for a term of three consecutive years agreeing to the terms and conditions upon which the loan purchase is granted, including such terms and provisions as will carry out the full purpose and intent of this part. No person shall be eligible to receive such loan purchase more than once during his or her lifetime. The form of such contract shall be prepared and approved by the Attorney General, and each contract shall be signed by the chairperson of the board and by the applicant.



393 (b) The board shall have the authority to cancel the loan purchase contract of any applicant  
394 at any time for any cause deemed sufficient by the board, provided that such authority shall  
395 not be arbitrarily or unreasonably exercised.

396 (c) The board shall adopt such rules and regulations as are reasonable and necessary to  
397 implement the provisions of this part."

398 **PART V**

399 **SECTION 5-1.**

400 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.