

**Rules for Administration of the Arkansas Rehabilitation Services
Forgiveness of Student Loan Program
Act 282 of 2021**

INTRODUCTION

Act 282 of 2021, effective July 28, 2021, amended and re-authorized the Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Forgiveness of Student Loan Program, which assists eligible employees with the repayment of qualifying student loans. The Forgiveness of Student Loan Program (Program) was originally authorized by Act 1275 of 2007. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), as the administrator of the Program, is authorized by Act 282 to promulgate rules regarding Program eligibility, payments, and management.

ELIGIBILITY

Individuals who meet the criteria below are eligible for participation in the Program:

1. Employment with ARS.
2. Completion of a six-month probationary period, beginning with the first day of ARS employment.
3. Proof the individual has incurred student-loan debt resulting from obtaining a bachelor's or master's degree in the field of vocational rehabilitation:
 - a. Documentation of the name and address of the student-loan creditor.
 - b. A payoff amount for the loan owed to the creditor, current within 30 days of the individual's application to the Program.
 - c. Documentation, such as a transcript or diploma from an educational institution, confirming that the individual received a degree in one of the following fields:
 - Rehabilitation Counseling;
 - Social Work;
 - Psychology;
 - Disability studies;
 - Education, including Special Education;
 - Counseling, other than Rehabilitation Counseling (master's level only); and
 - Counselor Education (master's level only).
4. Execution of an agreement by which the individual acknowledges, among other requirements, that ARS will not issue payments under the Program if the individual resigns or is terminated for cause.

PROGRAM PAYMENTS

Payments made by ARS under the Program will satisfy the following criteria:

1. Payments will be issued directly to the student-loan creditor identified by the individual at the time of application to the Program.
2. Each installment will be the lesser of \$2,000.00, or the current loan-payoff amount.
3. Each installment is conditioned upon the participant's continual employment over the two years preceding the date that the payment is issued.

For example, an individual who is determined eligible on August 1st of State Fiscal Year 2022 must be employed until August 1st of State Fiscal Year 2024 in order for an installment to be issued.

4. Participants may receive up to five installments, not to exceed \$10,000.00, under the Program.
5. Total payments under the Program in a given State Fiscal year shall not exceed \$80,000.00.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Pursuant to Act 282 of 2021, the following rules for Program Management will apply:

1. Individuals may submit an application for eligibility once per State Fiscal Year.
2. Each subsequent application must include all documents required to demonstrate eligibility. However, subsequent applications may refer to documents submitted with the original, approved application regarding the individual's degree in the field of vocational rehabilitation.
3. In all events, eligible participants must re-certify their loan payoff amounts within 30 days of a payment coming due.
 - a. For example, an individual whose application was approved on August 1st of State Fiscal Year 2022 must submit a current loan payoff amount 30 days prior to August 1st of State Fiscal Year 2024.
 - b. Program staff will send a written reminder of this requirement to eligible participants at least 60 days before a payment comes due.