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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- POSTSECONDARY TUITION ASSISTANCE FOR SHORTAGE TEACHING FIELDS

Introduced By: Senators Acosta, Mack, Zurier, Gallo, Valverde, McKenney, Thompson,
Quezada, and Kallman

Date Introduced: January 16, 2026

Referred To: Senate Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 117

4 POSTSECONDARY TUITION ASSISTANCE FOR SHORTAGE TEACHING FIELDS

5 **16-117-1. Creation.**

6 There is hereby established within the office of the postsecondary commissioner ("OPC")
7 a restricted receipt account entitled the Shortage Teaching Fields Tuition Assistance Fund ("the
8 fund"). The fund shall be used to provide payment from the state to an eligible individual's
9 institution of higher education toward a portion of their tuition and other costs of attending said
10 institution under this chapter.

11 **16-117-2. Definitions.**

12 For the purposes of this chapter, the following words and phrases shall have the following
13 meanings:

14 (1) "Costs of attending" means expenses other than tuition, room, board, and mandatory
15 fees that are necessary to the successful completion of a degree program at a Rhode Island
16 postsecondary institution. Such expenses shall be paid for in accordance with rules and regulations
17 promulgated by OPC, and may include, but are not limited to, transportation, child care, and course-
18 related books and materials.

1 (2) "OPC" means the office of the postsecondary commissioner.

2 (3) "Service requirement" means specific employment and work obligations that
3 individuals shall meet if they receive tuition assistance under this chapter.

4 (4) "Shortage teaching fields" means subject areas or teacher certifications that are
5 experiencing a critical lack of educators in the State of Rhode Island. These shall include, but are
6 not limited to:

7 (i) Any sciences for grades seven (7) through twelve (12); and

8 (ii) Any mathematics for grades seven (7) through twelve (12).

9 (5) "Tuition assistance recipients" means individuals receiving assistance toward their
10 tuition and other costs of attending a postsecondary institution under this chapter.

11 **16-117-3. Eligibility of individuals.**

12 (a) In general, tuition assistance recipients under this chapter shall:

13 (1) Be enrolled, or accepted for enrollment, at a Rhode Island postsecondary institution in
14 a program to become a teacher in a shortage field;

15 (2) Complete the service requirement set forth in § 16-117-4; and

16 (3) Fulfill any other conditions required by OPC.

17 (b) Tuition assistance recipients under this chapter shall not be required to:

18 (1) Provide a score from the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or Advanced Placement
19 (AP) test as a condition of admission to the teaching degree program of any postsecondary
20 institution in Rhode Island; or

21 (2) Be a resident of Rhode Island.

22 (c) If an individual receives tuition assistance under this chapter, and then leaves their
23 institution's program to become a teacher in a shortage field prior to completing their degree, the
24 tuition assistance provided to date shall become a loan to be repaid by the individual.

25 (d) If an individual receives tuition assistance under this chapter, and then does not
26 complete the service requirement provided in § 16-117-4, the tuition assistance provided to date
27 shall become a loan to be repaid by the individual.

28 (e) Transferring from one postsecondary institution in Rhode Island to a different
29 postsecondary institution in Rhode Island shall not negatively affect an individual's eligibility for
30 tuition assistance under this chapter; provided that, they remain in compliance with all other
31 eligibility requirements.

32 **16-117-4. Service requirements to receive tuition assistance.**

33 To receive tuition assistance under this chapter, individuals shall complete at least three (3)
34 years of full-time teaching in a shortage teaching field at any elementary or secondary school in the

1 state.

2 **16-117-5. Disbursement.**

3 All funds distributed in accordance with this chapter shall be:

4 (1) Allocated toward the tuition, room, board, mandatory fees, and additional costs of
5 attending a Rhode Island postsecondary institution to become a teacher in a shortage field;

6 (2) Provided to cover tuition, room, board, mandatory fees, and/or costs of attending a
7 Rhode Island postsecondary institution that remain after all other financial aid funds have been
8 awarded to the tuition assistance recipient; and

9 (3) Available for individuals to attend any Rhode Island postsecondary institution, public
10 or private; provided that, funds disbursed to a private institution for tuition, room, board, and
11 mandatory fees shall be limited to the amount that Rhode Island college charges for the same
12 expenses in the same academic year. Additional costs of attending a private institution shall be paid
13 for in accordance with regulations promulgated by OPC.

14 **16-117-6. Administration of shortage teaching field tuition assistance fund.**

15 OPC shall administer the fund and OPC shall promulgate rules and regulations necessary
16 to implement this chapter, which shall include, but are not limited to:

17 (1) The process for defining any shortage teaching fields in addition to the ones provided
18 in § 16-117-2, and updating said definition at least once every other year;

19 (2) Providing an easy-to-follow guide in a variety of languages regarding how to apply for
20 tuition assistance under this chapter;

21 (3) How to fulfill the service requirement, including the length of time afforded to
22 individuals to complete it and consideration for leaves of absence related to the health of the
23 individual or a close family member, pregnancy, and military service; and

24 (4) Defining the nature and extent of costs of attending a postsecondary institution,
25 identified in § 16-117-2, that individuals may receive assistance for under this chapter.

26 **16-117-7. Reporting**

27 (a) By August 1, 2027, and annually by August 1 thereafter, OPC shall provide an
28 evaluation of the fund to the speaker of the house, senate president, and the governor. The
29 evaluation shall include, but is not limited to, the following:

30 (1) The number of individuals whose request for tuition assistance under this chapter was
31 approved;

32 (2) The actual dollar amount paid for tuition assistance in the previous year;

33 (3) The shortage teaching area for which individuals received tuition assistance; and

34 (4) The name of the postsecondary institution(s) the individual attended.

1 **(b) Reporting required under this section shall take extreme care to maintain the privacy of**
2 **the individuals requesting and/or receiving tuition assistance under this chapter.**
3 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- POSTSECONDARY TUITION ASSISTANCE FOR
SHORTAGE TEACHING FIELDS

- 1 This act would create postsecondary tuition assistance for shortage teaching fields which
- 2 are defined as subject areas or teacher certifications that are experiencing a critical lack of educators
- 3 in the state such as any sciences grades seven (7) through twelve (12) and any mathematics grades
- 4 seven (7) through twelve (12). Recipients of tuition assistance would have to be enrolled, or
- 5 accepted for enrollment at a Rhode Island postsecondary institution in a program to become a
- 6 teacher in a shortage field and complete at least three (3) years of full-time teaching in a shortage
- 7 teaching field in this state.

- 8 This act would take effect upon passage.

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