



It's called Public Service Loan Forgiveness

If you work in public service, a government program called **Public Service Loan Forgiveness** could allow you to have all your Direct federal student loans forgiven, tax-free.

To qualify for the program, you need to make 10 years of qualifying on-time payments (120 in total) toward your Direct student loan, with those payments beginning on or after Oct. 1, 2007. And you must be working in public service at least 30 hours a week (you can combine multiple part-time jobs to meet this requirement) the entire time you make those qualifying payments. After you make your 120th on-time payment, the U.S. Department of Education forgives your remaining federal student loan debt.

Under Attack

Public Service Loan Forgiveness' effectiveness is hamstrung by a number of factors, including limited outreach to borrowers by both loan servicers and the Department of Education, complicated enrollment procedures and myriad disincentives for servicers to educate borrowers about their eligibility. Since PSLF's inception, the Department of Education has failed to effectively market this program—let alone provide basic information about it on a wide scale—to both employers and employees in public service.

Worse, this program has routinely found itself under attack from Congress, and most recently from President Trump. Thankfully, the executive branch cannot end PSLF by itself, because the program is established via statutes that require an act of Congress to eliminate it.

Our Response

There is no reason that Public Service Loan Forgiveness should go unpublicized and underutilized in the middle of our country's student debt crisis. Presently, a vast number of people working in public service are making key life and financial choices without being aware of a program that could erase their student debt burden.

We need to mobilize every eligible AFT member to utilize Public Service Loan Forgiveness and become vocal champions of the program if we hope to save it for future generations. The elimination of PSLF going forward would be a catastrophic financial blow to students and families who have made life decisions based on its availability. And a major incentive for pursuing careers in public service, which are increasingly underpaid, would be eliminated. We need to make sure members of Congress know how important this program is to AFT members struggling in the midst of the student debt crisis.

Beyond that, the AFT has been developing a strategy at the state level for taking on the student debt crisis. The bills we've been working on will create the first-ever consumer protections at the state level on student loans and create new student loan ombudsman positions with the power to act in the interest of student loan borrowers. This means that when wrongdoing is found, loan servicers will face real consequences for the first time.

We need to fight to keep Public Service Loan Forgiveness alive for the generations of teachers, school staff, faculty, healthcare professionals and other public servants to come. Whether it be raising this issue in your local, or engaging state or federal politicians, there is a role for all AFT members fighting the student debt crisis.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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