



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1621-2012, **Version:** *

Res. No. 1621

Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to enact S.7319/A.4930, the “Public Interest Legal Services Loan Assistance Act” which would allow public interest attorneys to qualify for a certain amount of educational loan forgiveness.

By Council Members Dromm, Brewer, Comrie, Eugene, Ferreras, Fidler, Jackson, Lander, Mark-Viverito, Mendez, Palma, Wills and Rodriguez

Whereas, Public interest attorneys work in government agencies, non-profits, and prosecutor and public defender offices; and

Whereas, Our legal system needs devoted prosecutors, public defenders, and public civil attorneys to make a long-term commitment to public interest work; and

Whereas, Public interest attorneys often carry significant and increasingly burdensome amounts of student loan debt that is extremely difficult to repay on their relatively low salaries; and

Whereas, According to the American Bar Association (ABA), many of today’s law school graduates are faced with debt of more than \$100,000 upon graduation; and

Whereas, According to the ABA, the median starting public interest salary in civil legal aid is in the low \$40,000s; and

Whereas, According to the New York County District Attorney’s Office, the starting salary for assistant district attorneys is \$60,500; and

Whereas, According to the Association for Legal Career Professionals, the median starting private sector salary is \$160,000 at large firms in New York City; and

Whereas, Many law school graduates who take on public interest jobs are forced to leave shortly

thereafter when confronted with major life decisions such as starting a family; and

Whereas, According to the ABA, many attorneys in public interest legal jobs leave after two to three years of employment; and

Whereas, Low income New Yorkers would benefit from additional attorneys working in the public interest who can assist them with issues such as immigration, housing and obtaining public benefits; and

Whereas, Loan repayment assistance programs have emerged as a solution for relieving the debt burden of some graduates; and

Whereas, Although the number of these programs has increased, they still do not meet the need of many attorneys who would like to work in public interest; and

Whereas, A report by the ABA entitled Making a Critical Difference: Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation's Loan Repayment Assistance Program shows that the \$6,000 in assistance given annually to public interest attorneys in Ohio has made a positive difference in their financial lives; and

Whereas, In 2012, Senator Kevin Parker (D-NY) and Assembly Member James Brennan (D-NY) introduced S.7319 and companion bill A.4930; and

Whereas, This legislation would establish the "Public Interest Legal Services Loan Assistance Fund," which would assist public service attorneys practicing public interest law in repaying their student loans; and

Whereas, Specifically, the fund would be established by increasing the fees to take the state bar exam and to be admitted to practice in New York as an out-of-state attorney; and

Whereas, Eligible attorneys working for public sector institutions could apply after three years of practice for grants of up to \$6,000 to cover the costs of their student loans; and

Whereas, Such a fund would help to recruit and retain public interest attorneys in New York State, including in the City; and

Whereas, The Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services in New York convened by the Chief Judge of the State of New York conducted a study in 2010 and found that recruitment of public interest

attorneys is especially critical in areas of high need including health, finances, employment, housing, public benefits and family issues, and such findings were affirmed in the Task Force's 2012 report; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to enact S.7319/A.4930, the "Public Interest Legal Services Loan Assistance Act" which would allow public interest attorneys to qualify for a certain amount of educational loan forgiveness.

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