



Senate Bill 134

Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment Program

SUMMARY

SB 134 allows for licensed attorneys to donate to the Public Interest Loan Repayment Program. The Loan Repayment program will ensure access to legal services in areas of public interest, by providing loan assistance to attorneys who practice in these underserved areas of law.

ISSUE

According to the American Bar Association, the average debt of a 2012 law school graduate was approximately \$85,000 when graduating from a public school and \$122,000 from a private school. This level of debt makes it difficult for attorneys who are interested in public service, to pay off their debt.

There is little incentive to work in public interest areas of law since the pay, on average, is substantially lower than private practice. Public legal service offices, such as child support agencies, have found it increasingly difficult to retain talented attorneys. Therefore, the clientele of such legal offices are deprived of an acceptable level of service. It is in the interest of the State to ensure that all Californians have access to quality legal services and have equal access to justice.

SB 134 (HERTZBERG)

This bill will authorize the State Bar of California to collect voluntary fees on behalf of the Loan Repayment Program, when collecting mandatory annual Bar dues.

The Student Aid Commission (SAC) will administer the program, which will include establishing participant eligibility criteria and selecting participants. The SAC is authorized to make 3,000 awards annually, given sufficient funding. Participants are eligible for a maximum of eleven thousand dollars (\$11,000) in four years of service.

For the purposes of this bill, providing direct legal service in public interest areas of law includes service at a (1) legal services organization that serves a clientele over 70 percent of whom are low-income persons according to applicable federal income guidelines, (2) prosecuting attorney's office, (3) child support agency office, or (4) public defender's office.

This bill will have negligible cost to the State since it will be financed by individual donations.

CO-AUTHORS:

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