

Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program should be preserved.

PSLF allows borrowers who make 120 monthly payments while working full-time for the government or certain not-for-profit organizations to have the remaining balance of their loans forgiven. In doing so, PSLF makes it feasible for recent law graduates (and other professionals), many of whom have tremendous student loan debt, to choose to enter public service careers, such as legal aid attorneys, public defenders or prosecutors, that are typically compensated at a level that can make it difficult for them to repay their student loans.

- > *Approximately 71 percent of students who completed a law degree in 2016 borrowed for graduate school, graduating with an average of \$116,890 in loan debt.¹*
- > *Meanwhile, the median entry-level salary for a legal services attorney in 2018 was approximately \$48,000, and an attorney in the same field with 11-15 years of experience earned an average of \$69,400.²*

PSLF can significantly support the people who need legal services the most by fostering an environment for public service lawyers to continue in the field. Having PSLF means these attorneys can focus on providing their clients more consistent, high-quality representation – something that benefits society broadly – without heeding the siren call of higher paying private industry work.

- > *Roughly 60 million Americans were eligible for legal services-funded assistance in 2017, yet fewer than two million had access to it.³*
- > *About 5,000 legal services attorneys in 852 offices were able to complete and close over 743,000 cases across the United States during 2018.⁴*

For more information on PSLF, visit **AccessLex.org**

The first borrowers only just began having their Direct Loans forgiven in October 2017, and early approval rates are low. This is due, in part, to the relatively low numbers of borrowers that had Direct Loans in 2007 and the limited number of income-driven repayment plans available at that time. Approval rates are expected to rise in the coming years, and there is growing demand for the program.

- > *As of June 2019, of the nearly 91,000 borrowers that have applied for PSLF, only 845 were approved to have their loans discharged.⁵*
- > *The average amount of loan forgiveness borrowers received is about \$61,000.⁶*
- > *The total amount of debt relief provided by the PSLF program is \$52 million.⁷*

PSLF helps not just lawyers, but also nurses, teachers, social workers and others who will be better able to take jobs in public service because of the program's benefits. Eliminating or capping this program will hurt low-income and middle-class families and can deter people from entering public service.

¹U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). "2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study". Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/postsecondary/index.aspx>

²National Association for Law Placement, Inc. (2018). 2018 Public Service Attorney Salary Survey. Retrieved from: <https://www.nalp.org/0618research>

³Legal Services Corporation. (2018). 2018 Annual Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.lsc.gov/media-center/publications/annual-reports/2018-annual-report>

⁴*Id.*

⁵U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal Student Aid Data Center. (2019). Public Service Loan Forgiveness Report. Retrieved from: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/loan-forgiveness/pslf-data>

⁶*Id.*

⁷*Id.*