

Critical Employees Recruitment and Retention Program Guidelines

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The Appropriations Act allows state agencies to spend state, federal, and other sources of revenue to provide lump sum bonuses to aid in recruiting and retaining workers in critical needs jobs which provide services that directly impact the health, safety, and welfare of the public. The proviso also allows agencies to provide paid educational leave, student loan repayment, and tuition reimbursement to individuals employed in critical needs positions. Agencies receive no special funding for this program; instead, agencies deciding to use the program must use funds from their existing budgets.

The South Carolina Department of Administration's (Admin) Division of State Human Resources (DSHR) must approve of the designation of critical needs positions applicable to these guidelines. DSHR will use guidelines to designate critical needs positions that include, but are not limited to: 1) the difficulty recruiting for the positions as reflected by data such as the vacancy rate maintained, the average time to fill, the lack of sufficient qualified applicants and other objective factors; 2) the difficulty retaining employees in the positions as shown by turnover data; 3) justification by the state agency that the position is critical to the core mission of the agency and directly impacts the health, safety and welfare of the public; and 4) assurances from the state agency that there are sufficient existing funds available to pay for items under this provision.

Agencies must submit a critical needs position form to DSHR outlining the basis for seeking to have the positions designated as a critical needs jobs. The form can be found on the DSHR section of Admin's website. Critical needs jobs may be designated by classification, internal title and organizational unit. Agencies will be required to submit annually the status of critical needs positions. Once positions are approved as critical needs jobs, agencies may then use any of the recruitment and retention programs outlined in these guidelines for those position. However, as set forth below, even after positions have been designated as critical needs jobs, agencies must still get approval from the DSHR director before issuing lump-sum bonuses.

State agencies must report to Admin by Aug. 31 of each year any expenditure under these programs. The Department of Administration shall compile a report of the responses and submit them to the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee by Oct. 1 of each year.

Lump-Sum Bonus Guidelines

Agencies are allowed to spend state, federal, and other sources of revenue to provide lump-sum bonuses to aid in recruiting and retaining workers in specified critical needs jobs.

Employee bonuses must be approved by the DSHR director and may not exceed an accumulation of more than \$10,000 in bonuses per year. Payment of the bonuses is not part of the employee's base salary and is not earnable compensation for purposes of employee and employer contributions to respective retirement systems. These bonuses shall, however, be considered earnings for determining if an employee who has returned to work after retirement is subject to the earning limitation imposed in either Section

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9-1-1790(A)(1) or Section 9-11-90(4)(a)(i).

The specific ways in which bonuses may be awarded are as follows:

Sign-On Bonus: Agencies may give sign-on bonuses to individuals recruited to critical needs jobs at the beginning of their employment with the agency. Bonuses cannot be offered or given to employees moving from other agencies by transfer, promotion or demotion. Sign-on bonuses are limited to one per employee, per year. At the agency's discretion, a sign-on bonus may be divided to pay a new employee a portion after one month of employment in the position and the remainder of the bonus after one year of successful employment in the position.

Referral Bonus: Agencies may give a referral bonus to current employees for referring a successful candidate for a critical needs or hard-to-fill position after a minimum of one month of employment in the position. Referred candidates cannot include employees moving from other agencies by transfer, promotion or demotion. In addition, referred candidates cannot be current employees of the hiring agency in any capacity, to include temporary, temporary grant, research grant, time-limited project or contract employees.

Retention Bonus: Agencies may give a retention bonus to a current employee in a critical needs or hard-to-fill position as an incentive to retain the employee. The employee must be in receipt of a bona fide job offer from another employer, either within or outside of state government. Employees are limited to one retention bonus per year, which may be paid in a lump-sum or in separate installments. An employee with a bona fide job offer who receives a base salary increase for retention is not eligible to receive a retention bonus based on the same job offer. An employee may not receive a retention bonus while in probationary or trial status.

Education Initiatives

Leave for Class

Agencies may provide paid educational leave for any employees in FTE positions to attend class while enrolled in degree programs that are related to the agency's mission.

All such leave is at the agency head's discretion to determine if the degree program is related to the agency's mission. Employees receiving leave for class are limited to such leave associated with no more than 10 credit hours per semester. This leave may be used when a class cannot be scheduled after work hours and the agency cannot rearrange the employee's work schedule.

At the agency's discretion, a service commitment may be required between the employee and the agency. The service commitment would require the participant to work two years with the agency for every one full academic year in which leave for class is received. If the employee separates before the completion of the service agreement, the employee would be expected to repay the agency on a pro-rata basis.

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Loan Repayment

State agencies may enter into an agreement with individuals employed in critical needs positions to repay them for their outstanding student loans associated with completion of a degree. Agencies may pay these employees up to 20 percent of their outstanding student loan or \$7,500, whichever is less, each year over a five-year period. Payments will be made directly to the employee at the end of each year of employment. The agency will be responsible for verifying the principal balance of the employee's student loan before issuing payments.

At the agency's discretion, a service commitment may be required between the employee and the agency. The service commitment would require the participant to work two years with the agency for each year of student loan repayment. If the employee separates before the completion of the service agreement, the employee would be expected to repay the agency on a pro-rata basis.

Tuition Assistance

The Tuition Assistance Guidelines are expanded to:

1. Increase tuition reimbursement from a maximum of six credit hours to 10 credit hours per semester.
2. Allow probationary employees to participate in tuition programs (waive the six-month waiting period).

All other requirements in the Tuition Assistance Guidelines will apply. An agreement will be required between the employee and the agency. If the employee fails to successfully complete the class, the employee will be required to repay the agency.

At the agency's discretion, a service commitment may be required between the employee and the agency. The service commitment would require the participant to work two years with the agency for every one full academic year in which tuition assistance is received. If the employee separates before the completion of the service agreement, the employee would be expected to repay the agency on a pro-rata basis.

Health Care Initiatives

Paid Practicum: State agencies may allow health care employees in approved critical needs positions to be paid while working on a practicum or required clinical experience toward completion of a health care degree. State agencies may permit field placements at other state agencies to be considered work time for participating employees.

Tuition Assistance: State agencies may provide tuition pre-payment instead of tuition reimbursement for employees willing to pursue a degree in a health care program. An agency may pay up to 50 percent of an

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employee's tuition through tuition pre-payment. The remaining tuition could be reimbursed to the employee after successful completion of the class.

Agencies currently using health care initiatives for programs pursuant to the Health Care Recruitment and Retention Guidelines must submit those positions to DSHR using the critical needs designation form for approval as critical needs positions.