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All right, good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our Public Service Loan Forgiveness webinar with 2026 updates. Just so you know, we are recording this webinar. It will be sent out to folks

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So, thank you for joining us. We're gonna jump right in as people are coming in, so that way we can start covering all of the important content that we have to share with you today. My name is Amber Hay. I am the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Advocate here for Washington State

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I'm joined with me with Terri and Jessica. Terri, do you want to go ahead and introduce yourself?

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I am Terri Parker. I serve as the PSLF Policy Analyst for the State Human Resources Division within the Office of Financial Management. Hello! Jessica?

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Thank you, Terri. Hi, everyone. My name is Jessica Manfredi and I am the student loan advocate for Washington State. And I'll pass it back to Amber.

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Great, thank you so much. All right, well today, hold on one second, turning my phone on, do not disturb, sorry about that. All right, so today we're talking about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, AKA PSLF

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Please note again, the presentation is being recorded. We are going to share the recording to all registrants via email along with the slides, which will include clickable links. And we're going to post them on our website as well so that you can have access to materials and you can share them with other folks

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And you can come back and reference this

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Webinar if needed. So, if you need them live closed captions can be enabled using your Zoom icon. We do have the chat disabled today, and participants are on mute. We've got a few hundred folks with us at this point. We had over a thousand people register for this webinar, so we're expecting a big turnout today.

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Please enter questions using the Q&A function and upvote questions that you'd like to have answered live. You can use that thumbs-up function. We are planning to have time at the end of the presentation for some questions. If you can, hold your question until we cover that specific topic. That'll help us

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Hopefully maybe anticipate some of those questions and get some of those answered before you even post them in the chat. So, you may find that your question's already answered. And as a general reminder, do not share personal information in the Q&A, as this is a public forum

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Keep your questions broad or general.

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Do you want to share a few general disclaimers? First, every effort has been made to ensure that this presentation is accurate. And as accurate as possible and up to date. But we know that information is subject to change, so please make sure you're also referencing the Department of Education's federal student aid website or FSA website

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For the most up-to-date information. We know that there's a lot of uncertainty and frustration and kind of chaos right now with so many changes that are happening, and, you know, we know that anxiety that you're feeling, we're feeling that same stress, and, you know, unfortunately, we don't have all of the answers, but please know that

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Our office and Terri's office, we continue to do what we can to advocate for Washington borrowers. Terri, Jessica, and myself, thank you in advance for your understanding and your patience throughout today's presentation. Our offices, we cannot tell you what you should do

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We can only provide information and education to help you make informed decisions regarding your own situation.

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All right, so what exactly is PSLF?

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In short, the PSLF program is a federal program that forgives the remaining balance on your direct loans after you've made 120 qualifying payments, which is approximately 10 years under qualifying repayment plan while working full-time for an eligible public service employer.

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PSLF began in 2007, was a bipartisan-supported effort, and signed into law by President Bush

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Because it was signed into law, it would take congressional action or a Supreme Court decision to dismantle the program. What started out as kind of a simple idea of erasing the student loan debt burden for those who dedicate 10 years of their lives to working in public service has expanded into the complex program that we have today.

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So I'm going to go ahead and pass it over to Terri to start our breakdown of PSLF.

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Amber. Okay, so let's start with how can folks qualify for loan forgiveness through the PSLF program?

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Primary requirements. First, the right type of employment

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Next is the right type of loan

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Third is the right type of repayment plan. And fourth is the right number of payments.

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Now let's break down each of these elements.

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So the first step, what is considered qualifying employment for the PSLF program? Next slide.

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You must be directly employed by a qualifying public service employer. The role or position you hold does not matter. The Department of Education

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defines eligible employment as work for U.S. government organizations at any level, at any level

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Federal employment includes service in the U.S. military and then state, local, and tribal government employment. Also, not-for-profit 501c3 organizations

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Other not-for-profit organizations who provide certain qualifying public services and serving as a full-time volunteer for AmeriCorps or Peace Corps.

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Contractors generally don't qualify for PSLF. However, there is an exception that allows contract work to be counted when state law prevents an otherwise PSLF qualifying employer from directly employing

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Staff to fill specific positions or provide certain services. For example, in Washington state, the Office of Public Defense has determined that contracts for public defense attorneys

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Count for Pslf eligibility.

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You also need to have full-time employment. And the definition of full-time is 30 or more hours per week. So this can be one full-time job or multiple part-time qualifying positions that add up to an average

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Of 30 or more hours per week.

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Qualifying hours include regular paid time off and leave taken under the Family Medical Leave Act.

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Also, throughout a contractual or employment period of at least eight months in a year, such as being a K through 12 teacher, qualifies as full-time for the entire year.

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Qualifying hours for part-time and adjunct faculty at colleges is calculated by multiplying each credit or contract hour taught per week by at least 3.35.

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So a couple of tips. Remember, you need to be actively employed with a qualifying employer when you make the last loan payment and be sure to check the "applying for forgiveness" box on the last PSLF form you submit.

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You do not have to be employed at the time you receive forgiveness just when you apply.

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You can work for different qualifying employers while making qualifying payments. For example, 10 different employers in 10 or more years. Also, employment months do not need to be earned consecutively.

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to ensure your PSLF credit is up to date, submit a Pslf form at least once a year

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If you change between part and full-time employment, and every time you leave and start a new job

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Finally, we want to note that there is no change to the PSLF employer eligibility requirements.

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The courts struck down the Department of Education's new rule that would have given them the ability to remove an employer's eligibility based on actions they believed to have an illegal purpose

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The Department of Education has appealed this ruling. However, the new rule remains struck down while the appeal is ongoing. The takeaway from this is that right now there has been no change to existing employer eligibility requirements.

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Giving it back to Amber

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Thanks, Terri. So next, let's go ahead and cover which federal student loans are eligible for forgiveness through the PSLF program.

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Only direct loans from the Department of Education are eligible for PSLF. These include the direct subsidized, direct unsubsidized, direct grad plus, direct consolidation loans, and parent plus loans, as long as all of loans were taken out before July 1, 2026

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The recent July 1 changes have drastically or may drastically impact Parent PLUS Loan borrowers. So we are actually going to review the different circumstances for Parent Plus Loan borrowers in the second half of the presentation. So please know that there is an entire section dedicated to Parent PLUS Loan borrowers. So

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Hold your questions on that topic until then.

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Here we've listed out the loans that are not eligible for PSLF. These loans include all types of the older federal family education loans, or FEL loans, as well as Perkins loans. Most of these loans can become eligible for PSLF through consolidation

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If you were to consolidate these old loans that don't qualify for PSLF with direct loans that already have qualifying payments, the new direct loan would receive credit for a weighted average of the qualifying payments. What that means is that

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critical to certify all employment for PSLF before you would do a consolidation to ensure that an accurate weighted average would be applied to a new consolidation loan.

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However

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I want to pause here to emphasize that loan consolidation is extremely risky right now and doesn't make sense for most borrowers due to the July 1 changes, consolidating your loans can have serious consequences such as losing access to your current repayment options and losing some of that credit towards PSLF and losing all credit towards income-driven repayment

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forgiveness. So, since consolidation only makes sense in a limited circumstance at this point, we would highly recommend that you consult with our office, the Office of Student Loan Advocacy, prior to making the decision to consolidate. Consolidation is permanent and cannot be undone

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And also, please note that you do not have to consolidate to get out of the SAVE forbearance or to access IDR plans. If your servicer tells you that consolidation is required

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They're likely wrong, and we would encourage you again to reach out to our office.

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If you're not sure what type of loans you have, please, please, please verify your loan information using your federal student aid account at studentaid.gov.

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Recommend that you explore all of the elements on your dashboard on Fsa. We encourage you to investigate and learn all you can about your loans. If you can't find that information that you're looking for, you can also call or chat with Federal Student Aid and ask them to list each of your loans and each of the specific loan types.

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Now I'm gonna go ahead and pass it over to Jessica

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Thank you, Amber. Okay, so once you have confirmed that you have the right type of employment and the right type of repayment, I mean, in the right type of loan, then the next thing that you want to make sure you do is ensure that you're on the right type of repayment plan

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But before I go over repayment plans, I did want to take a pause to address the saving on a valuable education known as SAVE plan for short.

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The saving on a valuable education plan, which was previously the REPAYE plan, has officially ended. Starting July 1st of 2026

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SAVE borrowers have began receiving 90-day notices to change plans

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We recommend that, if you are in the situation, for you to review your income-driven repayment options and apply on studentaid.gov

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to switch to a new repayment plan before your 90-day window ends

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If you do nothing

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meaning you take no action. You will be placed on the standard plan based on your loan type, which may or may not qualify for PSLF, and it may be higher than what you would pay on an IDR option

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As a reminder, the time or the months that you have spent on the SAVE forbearance don't count towards PSLF, but will be eligible for a program called PSLF buyback, which we'll talk about in more detail later in the presentation.

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And if you want in-depth guidance on repayment options and the forbearance, the SAVE forbearance ending, please watch a recording that we have available on our website that covers this covers this topic in length

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All right, so let's move on to talk about the repayment plans that are currently eligible for PSLF.

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It is important for you to know that due to the reconciliation bill that passed last year, which is commonly known as the One Big Beautiful Bill, repayment options have recently changed significantly as of July 1st, 2026

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and will change again no later than July 1st of 2028. In general, unfortunately, these changes have decreased repayment options that borrowers have while pursuing PSLF.

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As of July 1st of 2026, meaning currently, the following income-driven repayment plans are eligible for PSLF. The income-based repayment Plan, or IBR

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The Pay As You Earn or PAYE plan and the income contingent repayment Plan, ICR

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As well as the repayment assistance plan (RAP). Each of these plans have different eligibility or "rap" plan, sorry. Each of these plans have different eligibility requirements based on when you took out your first federal student loan

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Your income and family size, and your loan types. You can find out which plans you're eligible for and get an estimate for your monthly payment by beginning an income-driven repayment application on the studentaid.gov website.

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In addition, some of these plans have limited eligibility.

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IBR payee and ICR are only available to borrowers with only loans prior to July 1st, 2026. So new borrowers after that date are unable to access them.

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It's also important for you to know that if you take out any loans or consolidate on or after July 1st of 2026, the only income-driven repayment option you will have available is the new Repayment Assistance Plan, the RAP plan

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RAP will also be open to any other borrower with direct loans except for Parent Plus borrowers. Please note, RAP is typically not as generous as the older IDR options.

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Besides the IDR plans, there's also the 10-year standard repayment plan that is eligible for PSLF. This plan should not be confused with other plans with the word "standard" in it, which are ineligible for PSLF

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This includes the new tiered standard plan and any standard plan for consolidated direct loans with a loan repayment term between 12 and 30 years.

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Now, the PSLF eligible repayment options will change and be further reduced once again, no later than July 1st of 2028. First, ICR and PAYE plans will end no later than July 1st of 2028

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The department has not released guidance for when borrowers will need to transition out of ICR or PAYE, but if you choose to apply for one of these options, or you're currently enrolled in one of these options, ICR and PAYE, please be aware that you will have to change plans

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In the near future. So please don't ignore messages, notices, and letters coming from either the Department of Education or your servicer. In addition, we'll have just 2 income-driven repayment plans available on July 1st of 2028

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The income-based repayment Plan, which will be available only for borrowers with all loans issued prior to July 1st of 2026. And the new repayment Assistance Plan (RAP), which will remain available to all borrowers with direct loans, except once again for those with Parent Plus loans

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And once again, the 10-year standard repayment plan will continue being available for PSLF, but only available for borrowers with all loans issued prior to July 1st of 2026.

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And here is a quick guide comparison for the plans that are currently available. And the plans that will be available as of July 1st of 2028. I'm not going to go over this information again because we just covered it

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I'm just providing it here so that if you need a quick reference in the future about what's available now and what will be available in July 1st of 2028, you have that information

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And as a reminder, you can find which repayment plans you're eligible for and get estimates using the repayment Calculator on studentaid.gov.

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Now that we've covered which plans are eligible for PSLF, here is a quick summary of the plans that are not eligible for the program.

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The 12 to 30 year standard plans for consolidated loans

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They graduated repayment plan, the extended repayment plan, and the new tiered standard plan. Payments under any of these loans will not count towards PSLF

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And now I'll pass it over to Terri.

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So, let's do a little recap. So far, we've shared about the right type of employment

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The right type of loan and the right type of repayment plan. Now for the fourth requirement, making 120 qualifying payments

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All 120 payments must be made while under a qualifying repayment plan and for the full amount due as shown on your bill. This includes $0 payments for those who qualify for it under an income-driven repayment plan

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The only time these two payment rules don't apply is if you're under an accepted deferment or forbearance at any time during that month. And we'll talk more about those in a moment.

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Payments need to be made after October 1, 2007, when the program started

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Please be sure to make on time and complete payments. On time means on or before the due date for the full amount. Under the new rules, late payments cannot count towards PSLF

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And just a quick another tip, it may be very helpful to sign up for auto pay to avoid missing a payment.

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And last, payments do not need to be made consecutively or with the same student loan servicer.

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It's important to keep in mind that there are times when you cannot make a qualifying payment. You can only make qualifying monthly payments during periods you have a payment due.

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You can't make a qualifying payment while your loans are in an in-school status, in a grace period, and in certain types of deferment or forbearances

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Any payments made during those periods would not be considered qualifying for PSLF. And I want to make a quick note. This is different from the $0 IDR payments I spoke to in the last slide

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In some cases, you can decline in-school deferment for previous loans. If you return to school, for example, to get a master's degree, you can decline the in-school deferment for your undergraduate loans and continue making qualifying payments on those loans

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However, you would not be able to decline your in-school deferment for the new loans you receive for your graduate education. Additionally, once those new loans enter repayment, your payment options change to just the repayment assistance plan or RAP

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And the tiered standard plan.

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This slide lists the accepted deferments and forbearances that can count as a qualifying payment if you are still employed an average of 30 hours or more a week with a qualifying employer during that period. Most are self-explanatory, like cancer treatment

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Economic hardship deferment, and military service. Others are a little less known, like the administrative forbearance due to a local or national emergency.

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And the administrative forbearance for collecting supporting documentation from the borrower, such as when you apply for an income-driven repayment plan. We call these a processing forbearance

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These accepted deferments and forbearances count as qualifying payments, even though you're technically not paying anything during these periods. And to reiterate Jessica's note moment ago, SAVE forbearance does not qualify for PSLF

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Even if you made voluntary payments during the SAVE forbearance, those months won't count for PSLF. However, they may be eligible for PSLF buyback, which we'll touch on later in the presentation. Now, back to Jessica.

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Thank you, Terri. All right. So let's cover the temporary expanded PSLF program, also known as TEPSLF.

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We haven't really covered TEPSLF in our previous presentations before, because it used to be a pretty niche program. However, now that we are back into repayment and people have started making payments again.

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It is... it might be relevant for folks in things and that... something that you need to be aware of. Next slide.

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TEPSLF was created by Congress in 2018 after the initial challenges that borrowers faced getting PSLF, specifically because these borrowers were in the wrong type of repayment plan.

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One helpful feature is that if you submit a PSLF form, your payments are reviewed for both PSLF and TEPSLF. So, even if a payment doesn't qualify under the traditional PSLF program

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It may still count toward forgiveness under the TEPSLF program. However, it is important to keep in mind that the capsule opportunity is temporary. It has limited funding and must be provided on a first come, first-served basis

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Once all funds are used, the TEPSLF opportunity will end

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So, if you think TEPSLF could apply to you, it is important for you to understand the requirements and keep track of your qualifying payments. Next slide.

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So, TEPSLF may be the most helpful in two situations. First, if you are already close to forgiveness TEPSLF may provide a path to forgiveness for borrowers who have been making payments since October 2024

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Under our repayment plan that doesn't qualify for traditional PSLF. So if you since October 2024, have been making some payments in some of the repayment plans that we said were ineligible for PSLF, it's possible that some of these months are going to count

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towards the TEPSLF program. Second, TEPSLF may be worth considering if the PSLF qualifying repayment plans that are available are truly not affordable to you, right? In that situation.

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You may be further away from forgiveness, so like a few years away, but TEPSLF could potentially provide another option. However, there are two important things to keep in mind about this. Once again, TEPSLF funding is limited, so there's a risk that the program could end

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Before you'll become eligible for forgiveness

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Also, payments that are made under repayment plan that isn't eligible for PSLF won't count towards the traditional PSLF program. That means that choosing an ineligible plan could potentially make it harder for you to reach PSLF forgiveness later

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So, the key takeaway is to weight the potential benefit of TEPSLF against the risk of losing potential progress towards traditional PSLF.

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So what are the TEPSLF requirements that you should really be paying attention to if you're working towards this program? First, you need to understand that the last 12 months of payment in the program really matter

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So, to qualify, those final 12 months of payments must be either made under an income-driven repayment plan, or IDR plan, or your payments, if you submit them under a different repayment plan, need to be at least as much as you would have paid under an eligible

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IDR plan. One important point is that the RAP plan, the new repayment Assistance Plan, does not count towards this requirement.

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The best thing you can do right to make sure that you are on track to get TEPSLF is to track your TEPSLF qualifying payments carefully on studentaid.gov, and we recommend that you switch to an IDR plan

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For the final 12 months towards your 120, to make sure that you meet the requirement. And finally, there is one important exception. Parent PLUS loans are not eligible for the TEPSLF opportunity

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In short, as you get closer to forgiveness, if you're working under the TEPSLF program, be sure to review those final 12 months carefully to make sure your payments meet the requirements.

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And now I will pass it over to Amber.

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Thanks, Jessica. So speaking of Parent Plus loans, things have gotten even more complicated when it comes to PSLF eligibility for those loans. So I'm going to go ahead and break this down

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Bear with me, there's a lot to cover, and we expect that there will likely be questions that we'll come back to.

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As the name implies, Parent PLUS loans are taken out by a parent to fund their child's education. The parent who signs for the loan is the one who's legally responsible and whose employment would matter for PSLF. These loans can never be transferred to another spouse or to the child. They are their sole responsibility of the person who signed for them.

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Parent plus loans can exist by themselves and borrowers may have more than one if their child had multiple years that they signed Parent PLUS loans for. So you might see that you have Parent PLUS loans in your account individually

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You also might be considered a Parent Plus borrower if you have Parent Plus loans that have been consolidated one or more times, into a direct consolidation loan. So in that instance, we would consider that to be a direct consolidation loan with underlying Parent PLUS loans

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It is important for you to know that if you have Parent PLUS loans or have previously consolidated them into a direct consolidation loan, it's important for you to know whether you've done that as it impacts your access to repayment plans for PSLF.

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Additionally, you need to know disbursement dates for your loans, specifically you need to know if any of your loans were or will be disbursed on or after July 1, 2026. Disbursement is just the fancy way of saying that the date that the loan was issued or created.

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This information is accessible in your downloadable student loan data file that can be confusing to read, so you can also call FSA and ask them again for that loan type. And you can also ask for the disbursement date for each of those loans

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So those are going to be crucial pieces of information, in particular for Parent PLUS borrowers to determine your PSLF eligibility.

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To assist in sort of reviewing the circumstances, we've provided a flow chart that can help you navigate what we're going to be talking about. So, you can see here, if you first, whether or not you've consolidated your loans is sort of our first question

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Whether you have or not, then we move to, okay, was the loan disbursed before or after July 1, 2026, or if there were any loans disbursed after 2026, that then determines your eligibility for PSLF and under what plans you might be eligible. So we're actually going to go through each of these sort of circumstances right now.

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Our first scenario is if you have Parent PLUS loans that are still existing as Parent Plus loans. That means that they've never been consolidated. So if you have Parent PLUS loans

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And they were taken out before July 1, 2026, right? So if you're done borrowing and you took these out for your kids a while ago, then these loans are eligible for PSLF, okay? They are eligible only for PSLF, though, under the 10-year standard plan

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Because the way that they were set up is that they're not eligible for those IDR or income-driven repayment plans that Jessica was talking about earlier

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So, only they're only eligible under the 10-year standard plan. If you were, if you're looking at your student loan account and you have Parent PLUS loans, and they say your repayment plan is "level", I saw this question come up in the chat

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or in the Q&A, but if it says "level", that means standard plan. So if you have a Parent PLUS Loan and it says "level", that's generally the 10-year standard plan, which should qualify for PSLF

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You will want to note, though, that as the 10-year standard plan implies

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in 10 years, you would pay off your balance of the loan, which would be the point that you would reach forgiveness. So you can only really access PSLF for these loans if you end up spending some time in a qualifying deferment or forbearance that counts towards PSLF. So that would also include the ones that were listed on Terri's prior slide as well as time in the COVID forbearance

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Alright, one second here.

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Okay, so sticking with our theme of related to July 1, 2026. If you were a parent plus borrower and you consolidated your parent plus loans one or more times into direct consolidation loans

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And those consolidations took place before July 1, 2026. These borrowers are eligible for PSLF under the income driven repayment plans

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Initially, they're only eligible to enroll in the ICR plan, and this might be the plan that you're in already if you've been in this circumstance for a while

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But borrowers now, in this circumstance, can also gain access to the IBR plan, which is the income-based repayment Plan

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In order to access the IBR plan, borrowers first have to be in ICR or apply for ICR, and make at least one payment under ICR before applying for IBR. So if you've been on ICR, know that you... and you've already made payments under ICR

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Then you would be eligible to apply for IBR, which might actually be a lower payment than ICR.

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As Jessica noted, the ICR plan will be eliminated no later than July 1, 2028. This means that if you're in this circumstance that you must enroll in ICR and make that payment in ICR before the ICR plan is eliminated in order to access IBR

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And also then maintain your access to PSLF. Okay

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All right, so now switching gears to if you have loans taken out after July 1, 2026. So this scenario applies if you are a brand new Parent Plus borrower, maybe you've never taken out Parent Plus loans before, but you're taking them out this year or in the future

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For your kids or if you have older Parent Plus loans but then take out any federal student loans on or after July 1, 2026

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That would include a consolidation that disperses after July 1, 2026. Borrowers in these circumstances are only able to repay their Parent PLUS loans under that new tiered standard plan, which is ineligible for PSLF.

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So this naturally then means that you cannot make qualifying payments for PSLF and cannot then access PSLF or your Parent PLUS loans

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Again, this is specific to the Parent PLUS loans or any new loans disbursed after that July 1, 2026 date.

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Okay.

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Along these same lines, right, if you have a direct consolidation loan that includes those underlying Parent PLUS loans

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And that consolidation loan disperses on or after July 1, 2026. Then these borrowers would only be able to access that tiered standard plan, right? Because when you consolidate, it pays off the old loan, generates that new loan with that new disbursement date

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So these borrowers would also be ineligible for both PSLF and the TEPSLF as well. So

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What we want to emphasize to recap: Receiving any type of direct loan, including a direct consolidation loan on or after July 1, 2026, results in losing access to PSLF for Parent Plus loans

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As well as direct consolidation loans that include Parent PLUS loans, which also applies if you double consolidated your Parent PLUS loans. If you don't know that term, don't worry about it. If you know that term, you know that this applies to you.

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Once again, these borrowers would be forced into the tiered standard plan

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So they would not be eligible for PSLF for those loans, though they may be able to access PSLF through the RAP plan for any loan that does not include a Parent PLUS loan.

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Hopefully, this section has been helpful if you are a Parent Plus borrower, we know this is confusing, but that's why we really wanted to cover it in depth. So we'll definitely see if we can answer questions that we have out there. So

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We're gonna switch gears a little bit. Terri, let's pass it over to you.

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There you go.

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My apologies, bear with me just a moment. Thank you.

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All right, so now that we know all about what PSLF and

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TEPSLF are, forgive me, I'm not as good at the spoken acronym as just Amber are. Okay, so now we know what those are. You may be asking yourself, what is the process to apply

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and get my loans forgiven

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If you're ready to apply for PSLF, you can use the PSLF help tool on studentaid.gov to generate and digitally sign your PSLF form. This is the form that's used to certify your employment and to apply for the PSLF program.

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Key pieces of information you will need are your employer's federal identification number available on your W-2, your dates of employment, and your employer's PSLF contact email address.

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If you have worked for other, for I should just say if you've worked for Washington state agencies or public institutions of higher education, you can use the PSLF directory linked on the second bullet point to find the email address of the PSLF contact

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And that agency's employer identification number. It's best practice to submit the PSLF form every year, whether you switch employment, whenever you switch employment, and whenever you move between full-time and part-time employment with the same employer

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This helps you evaluate your eligibility on a yearly basis and adds to your number of qualifying payments.

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If you'd like more specific guidance on how to complete the PSLF form using the help tool, please visit FSA's article on how to become

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A Pslf tool ninja. Yes, that is the actual article name. The article will likely answer any questions you encounter while completing your Pslf form. Next slide

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To check on your progress towards PSLF and

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TEPSLF. You want to access the PSLF payment progress tracker on your FSA account dashboard.

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Federal student aid has also created a helpful guide on how to check and manage your PSLF project progress through your FSA account. We highly encourage you to explore the tool and get familiar with the information available. Be sure all your employment is updated

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And review your repayment history and PSLF counts regularly. As indicated with the red box, you'll need to click on the Review Details button on this section to see more information on the PSLF progress tracker. We plan to host another webinar in the next few months on using the PSLF Help tool

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And the PSLF progress tracker. So look out for more information.

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After your PSLF form is processed, you should receive a notice updating you about your updated PSLF qualifying payment count. You'll be able to review this correspondence letter under the My Activity section of your FSA account under the PSLF section

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If you disagree with the updated qualifying payment account that is provided in the notice, you can submit a PSLF reconsideration request form within 90 days of receiving the updated count. You'll need to provide information to support your request.

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We've linked information on PSLF reconsideration on this slide. Remember, to protect yourself from future issues, keep your own records of your payments, take screenshots of your payment history, and regularly certify your employment

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Passing back to Amber to review PSLF buyback.

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Thanks, Terri. Okay, thanks everyone just for sticking with us. We are almost to the end here. Many of you want to know about the PSLF buyback program. It's been in the news recently, and we've received lots of questions in our questions and complaints portal. So I'm going to go ahead and cover the program

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And how you may be able to utilize it

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And hopefully answer some of those questions that you may have.

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The PSLF buyback program was established in recognition that there are many borrowers who may have already worked for at least 120 months in public service, but perhaps they don't yet have 120 payments. So for instance

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Maybe you were making your payments on an IDR plan, and then you encountered a personal circumstance where you couldn't afford your payment, so you requested a forbearance. That forbearance didn't count for PSLF, but you were still working at that time. So PSLF buyback allows you to buy back the credit for those months

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That you already worked in certain types of those forbearance and deferment statuses. There are... there's a specific list of which types of forbearance and deferments are eligible for PSLF buyback. For that, you're going to want to look on the FSA webpage that we've linked on the slide

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But we did want to highlight that there are certain statuses or periods of time that the Department of Education says are not eligible for buyback. So this includes months while in school deferment, while you're in grace periods immediately following

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Leaving school,

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time spent in default, as well as time in a bankruptcy status. So those periods are not eligible for PSLF, and they're not eligible for PSLF buyback, nor for the TEPSLF.

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Note that you cannot buy back months for loans that have already been paid off or loans that were included in a consolidation. So if you've consolidated any point

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Okay, only the months after your last consolidation can be considered for PSLF buyback.

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To apply for buyback, you must have at least 120 months of qualifying employment already certified in your PSLF Progress Tracker. It's another good reason to certify your prior employment and recertify your current employment regularly

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Additionally, you must have enough months that are eligible for buyback with employment already certified for those months in order to reach the 120 needed for forgiveness. So, identifying those months that may be eligible is going to require some work on your part

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to review your PSLF payment history

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the PSLF Progress Tracker can help you identify which months in your payment history are marked as ineligible. You can contact your servicer to learn more about what type of forbearance or deferment they may have been in, as the tracker doesn't usually include that much detail, it just says

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may have been a non-qualifying forbearance or deferment status, so you might need to contact your servicer to learn more about that. The tracker also allows you to see what months you have certified for employment, so you can count and figure out how many months have already been certified to see if you already have your 120 months

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So you'll need to gather this information to figure out how many months you need to buy back in order to reach your 120 qualifying payments for forgiveness

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And how many months that you have that may actually be eligible for buyback

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This helps you determine when you're eligible to apply.

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If it sounds confusing, we know it's complicated. We are in the coming months gonna host a webinar where we're going to walk through how to use that PSLF Progress Tracker and help you figure out how to pull this information together. So look out for information on that webinar in the coming months.

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The biggest folks that, excuse me, the biggest question that folks have are about how PSLF buyback amounts are calculated. Okay, FSA says that your buyback amounts depend on what your payments

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likely would have been at the time, for those months that you're trying to buy back.

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They have provided some guidance, but to be honest, there's not a clear, like, calculator or set formula to be able to figure out, like, an exact amount. We have some guidelines to help you come up with some estimates

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So here's what we know.

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If you were on

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an IDR plan immediately before or after the months that you're buying back

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Okay. And you're buying back periods that are less than a year

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They'll use the lower of the two IDR payments on either side of those buyback months. So if you have maybe 6 months that you're wanting to buy back

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They would look at the IDR plan payment amount that you had before you went in that forbearance, and then after, and they would use the lower to determine that amount. Now, that's for periods less than a year, okay?

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FSA has identified an exception to this rule specifically for borrowers who were enrolled in the SAVE plan on or after July 18, 2024. So that's when that SAVE forbearance started. So for borrowers

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who've been on the SAVE Plan since then, or after who got on it after that point

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For these borrowers

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The IDR plan you were on before you got into SAVE

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will be used to inform the payment amount, okay? So they will not be using the SAVE formula to calculate buyback months for SAVE, but they will be using prior IDR plan that you may have been on immediately prior to SAVE

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to inform the payment amount. We don't know what informed the payment amount actually means

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But, here's what we kind of recommend to estimate what your buyback amount will be for time in the SAVE forbearance.

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We recommend kind of creating a range that you might think that your payment would fall between. So by using what your payment was under the last IDR plan you were in before SAVE started to create maybe a bottom range of what you might pay per month

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And then you could use maybe what your current payment is under your current IDR plan as maybe the upper range of an estimate for what you would pay for each month that you'd buy back. So that would give you a range, right, of kind of a low to high end

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That you can use to estimate and likely your payment amount will fall somewhere between those two. Of course, multiplied by the number of months that you're trying to buy back. So

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As I mentioned, there's no calculator for this. This is just the best guidance that we can provide at the time, at this time, to help you estimate what you may need to save up for buyback.

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If you were not in an IDR plan before or after the months you were buying back, so maybe you were in one of those plans like the extended plan or graduated plan, then FSA will request your tax information as well as family size for the year or years of time that you're trying to buy back

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They'll then use that information to calculate what your lowest payment under an IDR plan would have been with the amount being no greater than the 10-year standard plan. So that's if you were not in an IDR plan before or after the months you're trying to buy back

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Okay.

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When you believe you are ready and eligible. You meet the eligibility requirements to apply for buyback, you'll actually use the reconsideration request form.

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To submit your buyback application

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After submitting the application, borrowers are expected to continue making their monthly payments if they have one due, until their buyback is approved, okay? To make sure these additional months will count towards your PSLF, and hopefully then reduce the number of months you end up actually needing to buy back

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You may want to then certify your employment each month after making your payment. Your HR department might get a little mad, but

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That's okay, you're wanting to keep your months up to date. Once your buyback application is actually reviewed, you would be notified by either your servicer or FSA of the decision of your application.

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If denied, you would need to continue making payments until you're eligible to reapply

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If you're approved for buyback, you'll have 90 days to make the payment

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Note that if you submit a PSLF form after you receive that buyback agreement, that actually voids the buyback, so you wouldn't want to certify any months after receiving that agreement.

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We know that the department has a significant backlog of PSLF buyback requests

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We don't have any updated numbers to provide for this, but we know back in April, it was roughly 88,000 PSLF buyback applications that were in the backlog

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Roughly, we know that it's maybe somewhere between one to two years for buyback applications to be processed. Based on that data from like four months ago or almost five months at this point.

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But we're hopeful that this will actually end up being reduced, the backlog will be reduced in the coming months, as it appears that some of the servicers are going to take on PSLF buyback processing in addition to federal student aid. So if you are

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One of those borrowers that has already applied for a buyback and you're waiting, continue to make payments and certify your employment.

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Depending on how many months you need to buy back, you may receive your PSLF before your buyback is actually processed. You know, you may end up paying more in that instance compared to what you would have paid to buy back older months, but at that point, you would still receive your forgiveness, right? So, it's not a bad thing.

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And, you know, if you feel like you're eligible for buyback, you want to continue making your payments, it doesn't hurt you to apply for buyback when you're eligible.

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If you cannot afford the buyback payment amount within the 90 days specified on the agreement, the agreement would be voided, and we expect that this might happen, you know, if folks were expecting the SAVE amount, and the amount that

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Now being told they have to buy back is going to be much higher. They might not be able to afford it, but know that, like, the agreement would be voided, but you can always reapply for buyback in the future. So, if you have one application denied, or you're not able to make the payment when you get it approved.

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That doesn't mean you can't reapply again in the future.

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Okay. Now, final section, I'm passing off to, Jessica for some other PSLF updates.

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Thank you, Amber. Now we're just going to shift gears to talk through some important updates that are impacting PSLF.

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You may have seen PSLF in the news recently, so we just wanted to touch on some of these points.

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First, certain borrowers have received notice that some of their qualifying payments aren't counting towards PSLF. So, like, they were awarded qualifying payments, and now they're saying those payments being clawed back, right? Our understanding of the situation is that these borrowers have been on an ineligible repayment plan

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Since the account adjustment in 2024, in that a coding error was accidentally giving them credit for PSLF

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So, if you are in an ineligible repayment plan

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You should only be seeing credit reflected for the TEPSLF program, not for PSLF. So the department is correcting payment counts consistent with the rules of PSLF.

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These borrowers are being advised to switch into a PSLF eligible repayment plan to continue making payments towards PSLF.

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This only impacts a small number of borrowers. There is no indication that the department is taking away payments outside of this specific circumstance. So please don't panic

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Though I understand it can be anxiety inducing to hear these news. If you don't receive a notice, this likely doesn't apply to you. If you are a borrower who received one of these notices saying that some of your PSLF qualifying payments are being clawed back and you have questions of concerns

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You can submit a request for assistance to our office.

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All right, so in general, we're also seeing more widespread glitches on the PSLF tracker

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Which is where you can track your progress on studentaid.gov towards PSLF, such as the month of July or August not populating into the tracker. The department is aware of this, and it is working to correct the problem. We encourage you to check your tracker regularly

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Right, to make sure that these issues get resolved. And certify your employment to get the most up-to-date payment counts. If you're missing months other than July and or August, we also encourage you to go ahead and submit a complaint with

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federal student aid and our office

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And then finally, we want to acknowledge that recently there has been some news about a proposed IRS rule from the Treasury that could impact 501c3 nonprofit status for specifically private schools and private universities

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This proposed rule, which is open for public comment, could remove nonprofit status for private schools that utilize race for things like scholarships. As of right now, nothing has changed for these employers, but we'll be tracking this topic closely and provide any updates as they happen.

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One additional option to be aware of is that the auto pay interest reduction. So borrowers who enroll in AutoPay by 11:59 PM Eastern time on September 30th, so at the end of this month

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will receive a 1% interest rate reduction through June of June 30th, 2028. Autopay can also help ensure payments are made on time. Payments should be posted on time, even if the schedul

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They due date falls on a weekend or a holiday. So if you're pursuing PSLF, it's important for you to keep an eye on your payment history. If an auto-pay payment was made but it's not showing as counting towards PSLF

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Once again, please submit a complaint to our office to have the issue reviewed. So if you're considering auto pay, we recommend we recommend that you enroll by the deadline so that you can take advantage of the interest rate. And

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I also recommend that you continue monitoring your payments afterwards.

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So we're almost at the finish line here, and we're going to start the Q and A soon, but I wanted to share a few more resources for you to learn more, and also how you can get assistance with your student loans.

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So first, I want to highlight a few resources from our office. First, we have a Steps to Apply PSLF document, which has great step-by-step instructions on how to apply for PSLF. This is a great document, especially for those who are starting from scratch when it comes to PSLF

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But also for those who might already be in the program and want to make sure they don't miss anything. And we're going to be posting an updated version for this very soon on our website. Also, our PSLF frequently asked question document, as well as other helpful links and resources

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that are all available on our website, which is wsac.wa.gov/pslf. And Amber, if you could put the link to that in the chat, that would be helpful just so that people can access that. So check it out. You'll also have

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You also will have the slide deck emailed to you, so you will be able to click on all these links. I just want to make sure that people have access to this specific website right now. And then if you have any questions about your situation, or maybe you would like to submit a complaint about your student loan servicer

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Please use our complaints and questions form that is available at studentcomplaints.wa.gov. I'm going to have, once again, have Amber post that link in the chat as well. Make sure that when you

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go submit that, that you select the student loan questions and complaint form. And please note that due to demand, it is currently taking us about 8 weeks to respond to borrowers' questions or complaints that are submitted.

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And we will share the link, those links and resources on the chat for you, so you can access them after the presentation.

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All right, so there are also several additional resources available if you want to take action and or get additional support with your student loans. One option is to contact your Congressional House representative or US Senators and share your experience or concerns about

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Your student loans, constituent services offices can sometimes help you navigate issues with federal agencies, and you can use the Protect Borrowers Casework tool to identify your representative and find out how you can reach out to get that assistance.

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You can also submit complaints and feedback directly to Federal Student Aid using their complaint and feedback system. And finally, there are several organizations focused on student loan advocacy, and I know somebody asked questions about, like, potential class action lawsuits and things like that. These are some organizations that you can find out this type of information from if you

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follow them and are part of their mailing list. This includes protect borrowers, the student debt crisis center, the National Consumer Law Center, and the Debt Collective. These organizations provide information, advocacy, and resources that may be helpful to you as you navigate... to navigate your student loans.

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And depending on your situation, these resources can give you another avenue, not only for getting information, but also to raise your concerns and find support.

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Alright, thank you so much for the opportunity to present to you. This is our final slide, right on time for one o'clock to start a Q&A. I would like to ask you to please fill out a survey to help us continue providing resources

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for Washington borrowers like you, we're going to be posting the link in the chat for you so that you can access that survey. It's a short survey, but it helps us know how we're doing and help us create presentations like this that can help you with your student loans.

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With that being said, I think we're ready to start our Q&A session. Make sure that you're reviewing the questions and that you like do a thumbs up on the questions that you're interested in hearing about the most

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Because that's going to be the primary way that we decide what to answer first, okay? We do have currently 83 questions pending, so it's likely that we're not going to be able to go over every question today. So yeah, if you can help us by helping us prioritize in liking the questions that you want to hear about, that would be great.

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Amber, do you want to start?

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Yeah, sorry. Okay, I'm going to go ahead and also stop sharing the presentation so that you can also just see our faces as we answer questions. So

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Let me see here, we've got, I'm just going to read through, it's a long one, so let me just double check it

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Okay.

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I'm gonna read this, and Jessica, you and I might need to tag team. So, IBR and other IDR plans require annual recertification. After recertifying, borrowers get notification of approval and an updated monthly payment amount

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Have you been hearing about mid-cycle updates to monthly payment amounts?

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They provided some context that appears that they just 3 months after recertifying, they received an updated amount that was a huge increase.

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I know that depending on your servicer, there are some servicers that have

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glitches or weird things in their system. So, for instance, Mohela, they have this issue where when you submit a recertification request, it kicks out a repayment schedule notice that actually has like your old plan and your old amount

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We know that that happens, it confuses borrowers because it has a repayment schedule that then gets confusing. I don't know that I've heard about

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a mid-cycle recertification notice like that, so I would definitely encourage, if you've received something like this, please do use that link to submit a complaint to our office, so we can help you figure out what's going on. We also know that the

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If you've approved the IRS integration when you've applied for your income-driven repayment plan, so that's great as far as getting your income information, but that also gives them consent to do an auto recertification

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for your next cycle, and we've known that they're doing this quite a few months in advance, so it's possible this might be the issue of maybe, if you agreed to the IRS retrieval tool, they may have auto-recertified with the new start date for that new repayment might not be for 6 months in the future

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Potentially, or at the point that your current plan needs to be recertified. So that might also be the issue that's going on. Jessica, did you want to add anything to that?

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No, I just want to say that if your income in household size, I also need to add this because that could be it could be part of it's part of the equation, right? So if your income in your household size have not changed

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Your payment should not have increased by 600%. So just to reiterate what Amber said, you, I would encourage you to submit a complaint to us because it's possible that something is happening there that shouldn't be happening.

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Okay.

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Here's a quick one. If I'm already on auto pay, will I get the reduction? Yes, if you are already on auto pay, you don't have to do anything else. You should actually already see it applied. Check out your interest rate. It doesn't or it should tell you the percentage that it reduces it by, and so you should see that 1%

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instead of the typical,

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like 0.25.

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So yes, you should be able to see that on your servicer's website.

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Alright, do the months of COVID student loan payment grace period disqualify us from PSLF qualifications, or does that count as an accepted deferment?

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So

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My understanding in this particular situation, so if you graduated during COVID, the first six months would be your grace period, so your first six months after you graduated or you left school would be your grace period. So even though it was during the COVID forbearance, those months would not count because those would actually be considered your grace period

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The months after that, I need to double-check if I can find more information to confirm. Jessica, do you have

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Oh, okay.

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No, I was going to say that I think the person is using the term grace period here to just say forbearance or deferment. They're just like mixing those words, right? Because, you know, and we know these words are confusing, right? So it's completely okay that you mix them up because

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They basically mean there's a pause on your payments for different reasons, right? But I understand why you would use that. But the period under the COVID forbearance, the official period under the COVID forbearance, assuming you were working 30 hours or more for a qualifying

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employer should count towards PSLF, right? What Amber said about whether you graduated in the middle of the pandemic is true, that, like, there would be a six-month grace period where that wouldn't count. But assuming you graduated before the COVID forbearance started

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Back in March of 2020, then you should be able to get that entire period to count again, as long as you are employed at a qualifying employer during that period of time. So hopefully this answers the question

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accounts for, like, people just being confused about that wording, which is completely completely understandable

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Thanks, Jessica.

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Do you want to take this next one? Are there any class action lawsuits against the Department of Education regarding all of these barbaric changes? If yes, how can we join? If not.

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If not, is there talk about that? So you kind of alluded to this earlier when you talked about the other advocacy organizations. Do you want to just touch on that one more time?

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There are

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class action lawsuits against the Department of Education for specific situations and specific borrowers. I don't know something that would apply to everybody to just, like, list here today, you know? My recommendation would be, once again, if you want to be appraised of this type of action

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Would be to follow those, those organizations that I listed earlier. Protect Borrowers has been doing some work for people that, you know, are waiting on buyback agreements

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Also

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people that are experiencing idr delays which end at the end, it ends up benefiting all of us right in one way or another when they do these actions. But if you just want to keep appraised of, like, what's happening, that would probably be the way that I would recommend that you go

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So

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All right. So this borrower, nervous that the administration may deem the Washington State Department of Health is ineligible due to illegal activities in the federal administration's view regarding immigration, sanctuary state, gender affirming care. Has this gained any traction whereby the feds might exclude us? So

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Terri mentioned this towards the beginning of the presentation, talking about that employer eligibility rule. So that employer eligibility rule was the one that touched on those specific topics and would take away or give the Department of Education the ability to take away qualifying employment status

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from those organizations. So, that rule was struck down by the courts back in June

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Which means it's not gone into effect. Those, changes were not applied. The Department of Education is appealing that ruling, and so we, you know, we don't know

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what's gonna happen with that. But the rule is not in effect, and it remains struck down until that appeal is resolved. So, there's no kind of other information or any other, efforts in regards to state employment that we're aware of on this specific topic.

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You want me to take the next one, Amber?

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Yes, yeah, if you wouldn't mind.

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So what do you suggest if the payment counter on studentaid.gov is not correct? So this is a very general question, which is good, but I think that the first step that you need to take is to really dive into that information

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To try to make... figure out

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why that information might be missing, right? Because, like we mentioned earlier, right, there are certain periods of forbearance or deferment that are not going to count, right? So, oftentimes when people are saying, my payment counter is wrong

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It's either one of two things. Either they haven't certified all of their employment

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Or

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they have a repayment status or plan that is not valid, right? So these are things that you can find out by actually digging into your account. So I would recommend that you first eliminate, like, you rule out this. Yes, I have submitted my forms, and they have been processed

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by the Department of Education. And again, you can find out this information on studentaid.gov. And I have ruled out whether in that specific month that I think is missing, right? I didn't have a forbearance or a deferment that is not going to count. If you rule out those two issues

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Then, probably your next step would be to contact our office, so we can look into that further. But I highly recommend that you take those two first steps first, because that might answer the question to you, right, as to why some ones are missing

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or are not counting towards forgiveness

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And I would add too that if you're seeing something that's inaccurate after you've just submitted a form and it's within that first kind of 90-day window of getting your account updated from submitting your PSLF form, that's where you definitely want to utilize the reconsideration request. That's exactly what that reconsideration request is for

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And so you can provide additional information, right? Like, if they just missed applying it to one of the months that you had employment for, you just need to point that out to them, and hopefully they'll review it and correct it. So, don't also forget about that tool as well.

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All right, what about those people who consolidated back in 2023, 2024 when the previous administration pushed for this? How does that impact current PSLF eligibility? So this is a great question because I know that we've talked about consolidation quite a bit in this presentation. So if you consolidated back when there was the one time payment count adjustment or IDR payment count adjustment

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They called it kind of different things. This was back under the Biden administration that ended in 2024. So borrowers who consolidated to take advantage of that opportunity got credit for essentially all of their entire repayment history for any of the loans

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that were included in that consolidation

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So it gave a lot of people, more qualifying payments towards PSLF. So if you consolidated back then, so you have a direct consolidation loan, you haven't yet reached your PSLF eligibility, you should continue making payments on a qualifying repayment plan

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If that consolidation loan included the Parent Plus loans, then you want to be on ICR and then get onto IBR to maintain access to an income-driven repayment plan that will be eligible for PSLF. If you

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Didn't have a Parent PLUS loan in that consolidation, then you should be able to access any of the currently available plans back on that slide that had the comparison. And again, we're going to send this PowerPoint out

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So, it doesn't... just having consolidated back then doesn't really impact your current PSLF eligibility in short. So hopefully that answers the question. Jess, did you want to add anything else to that

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No, if anything, it helped you. I'm just saying like consolidating in 23 and 2024, very different from consolidating today. So just want to make that clear.

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Yes, yeah, the point at which things really make a difference is that July 1, 2026 date. It's consolidating or taking the loans out after that, but that really changes things.

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All right, when does the standard plan count towards PSLF, Jessica

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So

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Only the 10-year standard plan

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counts towards PSLF

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It doesn't matter what kind of loan you have. It could be a consolidated loan. If it's a 10-year standard plan, or it could be a parent plus loan. It could be just a regular direct loan, right? As long as it's a direct loan of some sort

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If you're repaying your your your loan under the 10 year standard repayment plan. It will count now, like I explained earlier, there are other plans that have the word standard in it right that

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Don't count towards PSLF. So, for people that have consolidated loans, if the terms of your consolidation loan standard plan is between 12 and 30 years, that doesn't count right towards Pslf

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And there's also the new tiered standard repayment plan, which has a 10 year term but does not count, right? That doesn't count. So it needs to be

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the right type of standard plan. It's the 10-year standard plan, any other type of standard plan, even if it has the word standard in it, does not count. So hopefully that answers your question.

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All right.

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Next one with the most upvotes. Remember, you can upvote questions as well to increase their priority.

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What if you filed for bankruptcy and were cleared, you had PSLF, is there a reason why they did not clear PSLF as an economic hardship? What this is getting at is, like, your loan status. So if you file for bankruptcy and you have an active bankruptcy claim.

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Your loans through the court action are automatically placed into a bankruptcy status, which means you do not have to make payments. But that bankruptcy status doesn't count for PSLF, it's not qualifying for PSLF, and that's just by rule.

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Even if you're working for a qualifying employer, even if you make voluntary payments, it's not going to count for PSLF because you didn't have a payment actually due, right, which is one of those requirements for a month to count for PSLF. So,

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That's the rule once your bankruptcy is cleared and your loan status changes, enters back into repayment, then those months can continue counting for PSLF.

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Yeah, Jessica.

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Oh, you're muted, Jessica.

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Sorry, I just want to add, if this is a previous period of bankruptcy, this might not apply to you, but I'm just because there might be people that are currently going through that process right now and or will be going through that process in the future. You can ask your lawyer to ask the court

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For you to remain in an income-driven repayment plan while the bankruptcy proceeding is happening. Okay, so this is an option. And it's also possible that because of what you're going on through bankruptcy, that you might have a very affordable payment available to you when you're an IDR.

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So, this is to say that you don't have to be forced into that status. If you want to continue making progress towards PSLF, look into IDR and make sure that you discuss that with your lawyer if you want to continue making payments that are eligible.

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Sometimes it could be a $0 monthly payment, depending on your eligibility.

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All right

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Next question. I applied for PSLF under the buyback program and I have continued to make monthly payments after applying. Given the backlog and delays with the buyback program, I'm now eligible to apply for PSLF normally without buying back.

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Should I wait for the buyback program, or should I just apply for normal PSLF? So we can't tell you what to do, but

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I don't see a benefit of waiting for buyback

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Jessica, do you agree, disagree

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The only benefit of waiting for buyback is that maybe the buyback amount might be lower than what you're currently paying on your monthly payments. But the downside of waiting is that

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We don't know how long you're going to be waiting, right? You could be waiting for

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years. Like, I'm just being honest, right? So, if you're only a few months away

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From getting your forgiveness

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It might be worthwhile to just make those payments to be done with it, right? But yeah, to answer Amber's question, we can't tell you what to do. It really just depends on what your risk analysis of this, right? Do I rather wait for a long time to get a buyback agreement that may or may not be affordable

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Or am I comfortable making payments and just getting it done? So you have to ask yourself that question and seeing what makes sense in your situation

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Yeah, and note that it's not entirely clear if those months would end up being refunded to you. So like if you got your buyback request, paid the amount for those prior months, theoretically, your buyback is then dated to the month that you reached 120

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And payments after that fact might be refunded, but it's not really clear at this point with the information that's available. We just haven't had enough instances of this occurring yet to know what exactly is going to happen.

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And if you were to be eligible for a refund, refunds can take anywhere from 90 days to a year to actually appear in our experience previously. So

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That

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Help your math and your determination. So

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There's a question related to FMLA. Terri, have you seen that one? Is that one that you want to jump in on?

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The question says, my family is planning for a pregnancy. Can you please discuss how to navigate paternal leave time and stay on track with the PSLF program? Is there any documentation needed from the family medical leave program?

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So

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I think the best way to look at this is to recognize

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That they're kind of both a separate track, although they overlay. So

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You should be working with your... generally, it's a payroll office, but it might be your HR team, letting them know that you're getting ready to

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Use the Family Medical Leave Act for parental leave and developing your leave plan

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So, I shared earlier that regular paid time off and leave taken under FMLA qualify for PSLF. So, what that means is

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All the time that your employer tracks for your leave. So family medical leave provides for gosh, it's been a while. I want to say it's 480 hours in any given year of paid leave, essentially six months. Sorry if I'm getting this wrong, but

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And so it also enables you to take leave without pay without any repercussions from your employer.

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So that means all of the time that you're gone for your pregnancy leave

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Will... should be just documented as your normal employment type while you're out. So it doesn't matter if it's paid hours or unpaid hours, they just will look at your status, so if you're 100% employee, then

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You know, that's going to meet that 30 hours or more a week average. If you're part-time employee, it's only going to, you know, equal the part-time equivalent for that full-time employment. And I want to take this quick opportunity because I saw another question about being part-time. Remember, you can also, if you will

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Stack part-time qualifying employment. So if you have a part-time job with one employer and a part-time job with another employer during the same period of time, you just want to fill out your PSLF form and submit it to both of those employers while you're making your qualifying repayments

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And then that will get added together in the studentaid.gov account to give you full time credit if they add up to 30 or more hours per week. The other

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Question here is documentation. The documentation needed for FMLA goes to, you know, the assigned representative at your employer to get you qualified for FMLA. You do not submit any of that FMLA paperwork as part of your

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studentaid.gov account in terms of qualifying. It's up to the employer to know the rules. That's why we're educating you, so that you can be your own advocate. And and so, yeah, you submit for the Fmla

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leave with your employer, and then they'll know that when your form comes in to be completed to certify your employment period.

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So

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Yeah

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And might jump out and just quickly add to that, that

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When your employer receives the form, they can access all of the information, like the form actually provides a line in there that says that, like, routine leave and leave that happens under FMLA qualifies, so they shouldn't have any issues signing the form. If you get pushback, or they decline to sign the form, and

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That form has time and FMLA, please reach out to our office. If they're a state employer, you'll want to reach out to Terri's office, but if they're like a nonprofit or a local government or

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other employer reach out to our office, and we can help connect with that employer to educate them

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Okay

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So is there a way to get one-on-one advice? Jessica, do you want to answer this one?

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Of course, Amber. I want to say we don't give people advice. This is just me reminding you all that we don't give people advice. We don't tell you what to do.

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And you are the one making your own decisions. So I want to make that clear. We're not counselors, we're not financial planners, we are not your legal team, right? With that being said, if you're really stuck in a situation, right, you have

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issues with their studentleid.gov account that are not being resolved. You have complaint against your servicer. You really cannot figure out how to do any of this, right? You can't submit a request for assistance

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to our office using the link that we shared earlier, the studentcomplaints.wa.gov website, right? This is a resource that's available to you, and if you feel like you need that one-on-one help, I would encourage you to submit it. With that being said

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Right? I would say that some of the most

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Like, the questions that people have, like, what repayment plan is the best for me? How do I submit my form? Those are questions that you... you... it's easy. It can be fairly easy for you to troubleshoot through, right? So I want to first... first

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encourage you to utilize the resources that we already have available, right, to see if you can navigate to your questions. But if you really get stuck, we are available. You can submit a request. Just be aware, I said this earlier, that it is taking us 8 weeks to get back to you, so you're not going to get an immediate answer

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And that's why utilizing some of those resources in the meantime might get you to where you need to be. So

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All right, thanks, Jessica. Once you submit your final PSLF form and have met the requirements, how long does it take for the remaining balance to be forgiven? What kind of communication should I expect to see that tell me things are proceeding? This is an excellent question. So.

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You know that you've hit your 120 payments, you submit your final form to certify the last months that you have just made payments on. There's an option when you submit that last form to say, I've met my 120, please put me in a forbearance

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So you can click that to not have to make any more payments, you can also, if you've already submitted the form and haven't done that, you can also contact your servicer and request a general forbearance, to stop payments as well, if you are sure that you've met the requirements

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Just know that a forbearance at that point isn't going to count for PSLF, so if something... if there's an issue, right, then you might need to have extra months that you make payments, but that's only if there's a problem. Once you submit the final form, so the Department of Education

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Monthly, once a month, runs the list of folks that have reached 120 payments in the PSLF progress tracker. We don't know when this occurs throughout a month, but we know that roughly once a month they do this. And they do a verification process

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To see... make sure that all is correct. At that point, once they verified it, they send a notice to the borrower that would be in your FSA account under that my activity section. Usually it's going to be under my activity and then the PSLF

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section underneath that, you would have a notice about reaching your forgiveness. When they send you that notice, they also then notify the Student Loan Servicer to actually process your discharge. And so

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From when you submit your form to when you actually see a discharge of your loans, I would say it could take between 30 and 90 days, roughly. And once your loans are actually discharged from the servicer, the servicer will also send you a communication as well. So you get a communication from FSA,

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And from your student loan servicer. And so, what we'd say is, like, if you see your loan balance zero out on your student loan servicer, that's generally the final step, although we also recommend keeping track of your credit report to make sure that your loans actually get paid off and cleared from there as well. So

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That's kind of the process once you actually hit 120

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Okay. I know we're at 1:30. I'm good to keep going for a little bit longer with some questions. Jess and Terri, I don't know if you are on board for that

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Yeah, that's fine.

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Okay.

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I can answer the next one if you want me to.

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Okay, yeah, yep. Yeah, the next two are kind of sort of related.

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Yeah, yeah. So people are asking, are there tax implications for receiving PSLF after you heat 120 and get the forgiveness process? So at the federal level

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There is no tax implications, right? So, you're not going to have to pay federal taxes on the amounts that you get forgiven under PSLF. Now

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That can be different at the state level in Washington state, we have currently no income tax. I don't think there's any

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Possibility that this will kind of going to come to fruition in the future. And even then, I doubt that likely PSLF would be taxable at Washington State, but I don't know what you all are going to do after you get your forgiveness, right? You might decide that you want to move somewhere else. So just be aware that there are some states that do

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tax PSLF forgiveness. So if you move somewhere else while you're doing that process, right, like in the tax year that you're getting your forgiveness, make sure that you check the tax code for that state because it might be taxable at the state level, but at the federal level

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No, you should not have to pay income tax on those loans forgiven under PSLI

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Yeah, and I would add the only state that I'm aware of at this moment that does tax PSLF is Mississippi.

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But that could change.

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Right, so

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Double check that, of course. It could change, yep, but that's what I know right now. So

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Okay, do we have to buy back all of the months, including those we were not in qualifying employment, or do we just get to buy back? So, good question. So, you can only buy back the months that already have qualifying employment time. So

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You can't buy back months and would not be expected to buy back months where you don't have qualifying employment. So that's... that's where one of those requirements in order to apply for buyback is that A, you already have at least 120 months of employment certified, but B, the months that you want to buy back

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also have that qualifying employment certified. Those two things may overlap, but they also may be slightly different. But no, you would not buy back months that were not in qualifying employment.

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All right. I'm retiring at the end of January. I've applied and heard nothing. Would I then be ineligible? So I'm unclear if you've applied for PSLF, like submitted an employment certification form, or if you've submitted an application for PSLF buyback

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If you've applied for PSLF to just certify your employment, and you haven't heard anything back, and it's been more than a month or two, I would recommend submitting that form again, and submitting it your PSLF form for all of your prior employment

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If you've applied for buyback and you know that you already have the months that would be eligible for buyback, what matters is that you were employed at the time that you applied for buyback. But that also assumes that

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Your buyback will be approved, right? So if your buyback ends up being denied and at the point you've already retired, that might then become a problem. And you're not able to, you have to be employed at the time that you apply for forgiveness for regular PSLF

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So if you would not reach your 120 before that January 2027 and you retire, you wouldn't be able to then reach PSLF after that fact, unless you were to go back to work.

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Oops.

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I can take the next one if you want me to.

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Okay, yep

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I'm just trying to give you a break, Amber, just so that you're not talking

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Thank you.

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So can you explain why consolidation might impact eligibility for PSLF? I missed this point in my loans or consolidated tab plus years ago. Michelle, you don't have anything to worry about. If you consolidated 10 years ago

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Consolidation is not going to impact you. Like Amber said earlier, the point in time where it makes the biggest difference whether you have consolidated or not is if you consolidate your loans after

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July 1st of 2026. And specifically, whether your loans were issued after July 1st of 2026. And the reason why I'm saying this is because there might have been somebody that maybe applied in June of 2026, but that loan was not consolidated and issued until July

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Right? So that person would be under the new rules and the new repayment options that are available under the reconciliation bill. But for somebody that consolidated 10 years ago, none of this should impact you

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In the sense that, like, the consolidation itself is not going to impact your eligibility for Pslf. It's really consolidations disbursed are issued after July 1st, 2026.

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All right. So next question, my PSLF payoff falls early in 2028. Can I remain on the PAYE plan until then? So

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What we know about payee right now is that it will be eliminated no later than July 1, 2028. We say no later than July 1, 2028, because that is the language that the Department of Education has been using on their webpages

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Which implies that it's possible that they may transition or set an earlier deadline. The July 1, 2028 is just by the HR one, the reconciliation bill. That's the latest that the plans must be eliminated by.

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So theoretically, they could be eliminated sooner, but we haven't heard anything specific. We're just being very careful to follow what that language on the website says. What I will say is if you're on PAYE, you need to recertify at the time that you would normally recertify

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I did see a note in one of the questions, I don't know where it is at this point, about someone running into difficulties getting their PAYE certified when they applied using the online IDR application and they were instructed by their servicer that they had to submit a paper application. So it's possible that you may need to do that for the PAYE

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I don't know why there might be those issues, but it's possible that they could be or could be related to the changing of the plans and things like that. So it's possible that you may need to submit a paper application, and if that is the case, I would recommend submitting or like applying for recertification

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earlier than you may need to, just to give time for paper application to be processed. So that may be maybe a couple of months beforehand, before the end of your current

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payment amount, just to try to make sure that you're going to have no gaps in that eligibility.

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Do you have anything you want to add, Jessica?

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Okay.

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All right, I'll answer the next question. If I switch to IDR, it asks whether I want to keep in forbearance until it ends. Is it better to maintain forbearance until it ends?

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Again, this depends on your situation, right? So for some people, they really cannot afford to make payments, so they want to delay making payments as long as possible. So, for those people, it might make sense to stay in a forbearance

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Great. Now

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For people that their primary goal is to continue making progress towards PSLF, then opting to stay in a forbearance longer than you want to, that you need to

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Right? Could delay you getting PSLF, right? So, really, it's a personal question that you have to ask yourself. I will say that the administrative forbearance that is put into place when you apply

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Right? Because they're collecting paperwork from you, and they're processing the application.

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For up to 2 months will count towards PSLF, but any additional forbearance on top of that would not count. Right? So keep that in mind. You might be able to get to buy yourself a month or two, potentially, just by applying

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And still be able to get IDR credit. But if you choose to be in a forbearance for any longer than that, then likely that period of time won't count towards Pslf. So but again, for some people, they can't make a payment, and they want to delay it, and it makes sense in their situation

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All right, do payments made during the COVID pandemic count? So the COVID forbearance happened between roughly March 2020 and I want to say August or September 202

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2023, sorry. Three years. You were not required to make payments during that time period, and as long as you were employed by your qualifying employer for the number of hours per week and certify that employment, those months will count, even if you did not make a payment

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Now, if you made payments during that time, unfortunately, it were too late where you could get refunded. They are not going to account for any extra payments towards your PSLF. Those months would have counted either way. So

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Yes, but not because you made payments, it's just because that time period would be counting

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All right, so the next question is, if you are in the wrong loan or wrong loan repayment plan and transition to a qualifying loan and repayment plan, does the 120 payments count start again. So this is a little bit more of a nuanced question, right? If you were in a wrong loan

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So, for example, you had a FFEL loan right today and I'm talking about today, right? I'm not talking about consolidations that might have happened in the past, but maybe today you have a FFEL loan or a Perkins loan, right? And

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You want to pursue PSLF. The only way you could do that is by applying to consolidate that loan into a direct loan

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If you do that right, any

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credit that you might have towards income-driven repayment forgiveness, which we didn't talk about until now on this presentation, right? On that loan will be lost, right? So we really want to caution anybody that is currently in the wrong loan

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So again, FFEL loans and Perkins primarily, there's some other types of loans that don't qualify, but those are the ones that are more common. From consolidating before investigating if they have made significant progress towards income-driven forgiveness, income-driven repayment forgiveness

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Prior to doing that consolidation, to make sure that it makes sense for them to consolidate. So if you are in the wrong loan, right, I would recommend that you reach out to our office so that we can help you figure out whether consolidating might make sense

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in your situation to qualify for PSLF. Now, if the only issue you have is that you're in the wrong repayment plan, right, so you have a direct loan, you know your loan counts towards PSLF, and you just have to switch into a new repayment plan.

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If you have made any qualifying payments towards Pslf in the past, you're not going to lose that by switching into a qualifying Pslf repayment plan. Right? So switching repayment plans

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you keep any credit that you have. If you are in the wrong loan and you need to consolidate to be on the right loan. You might lose credit for other things. So we want to make sure that you take a pause and get some guidance before doing that. So hopefully that answers your question.

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And I would add, too, as well, because of the payment count adjustment that occurred back in 2024, it's possible that time periods that you were previously in an ineligible plan are now going to count towards PSLF and all you need to do is certify your employment because of what was done and how payments were

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Changed, essentially, because of that adjustment, right? So if you were... they basically converted any months that you had in repayment prior to that adjustment, they converted those months to be income-driven repayment payments considered. So, it's really important that you've made sure you've certified all of your

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prior employment on the off chance that you might actually perhaps be eligible for forgiveness or have quite a few payment counts already, that you just need to employ... certify your employment. So that's another good reason to use that payment count tracker, that payment PSLF progress tracker, to start looking at some of those. It'll show you if you have months that are eligible that just need employment certification

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So, definitely dive into that tool. Next question real quick, if you are employed in the same job, recommend certifying your employment at least every year, at least annually.

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Just that way you're keeping your payment counts up to date, and you can track your progress as you get closer and closer to forgiveness.

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Okay.

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If you are having difficulty getting in contact with your employer to have them verify your employment

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This one I'd recommend maybe submitting a ticket with our office, so we can maybe help you try to connect with that employer. It's always easiest if they're able to sign the form, that's going to be the fastest way for them, for that form to get processed and for those payments to be updated on your account

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There is a way where you can submit a paper form with other verification of your time. So like your W-2s, for instance. But it could take like a year for a paper form with a new employer or those alternative documents to get reviewed and approved

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So connect with us and we can try to figure out what routes are available

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Alright, we're at 145.

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Answered almost 40 questions at this point. I don't know about you all, but I'm kind of at the point where I probably need to stop and take a break. So

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Are we okay? Go ahead and stop me at this point.

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Okay, yeah, oh yeah, yeah

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I do want to answer one more question, though, because I think it's a good question.

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Yeah, go for it.

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But then we can be done after that. Is that okay?

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Yeah.

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Yeah, which is the next question. So, how does forgiveness work when you have a different number of payments on different loans? I have 6 loans with 74 qualifying payments and 4 loans with 100 qualifying payments. I have applied for buyback, but I hear the 2 years before they get to you. I'll likely be done with 120 payments before they get to my

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application. Unfortunately, that's true. It's likely. Will my four loans with 120 payments be forgiven when they hit 120, or will I have to continue paying on those loans until the other 6 hit 120?

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So no, when you have loans that have different qualifying payments, right, which likely this happens because you probably went back to school, right? You probably went to school, made some payments, went back to school

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Made some payments right like that's likely why this happened. It's something that we see often with people. Basically, it just means that

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Each loan are going to have their own track to get to 120, so once the ones that have 100 payments get to

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120 qualified payments, those will get forgiven, but you're still gonna have to continue making payments on the loans that, at that point will have

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Let me do the math here. We'll have 94 payments right until those get to 120. So no, they will get forgiven in different timelines, just to explain that to you in plain words. And you will continue to have to making payments on the loans with less payments until those

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those loans get to 120. So hopefully that answers your question. And it is possible, given the timelines that you might get a buyback agreement just on the loans that have 74 qualifying payments at this point, right? Because

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Those are going to be in payment longer than the ones that are closer to forgiveness.

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Okay, I just have one more I want to quickly answer. Do disabled military vets qualify for any special or additional loan forgiveness? For this person, I would highly encourage you to look up the total and permanent disability discharge program

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the... depending on the percentage of disability by the VA, you may qualify for forgiveness or whoever you're talking about may qualify. So please look into the total and permanent Disability Discharge Program

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Okay. One of the things I will say, thank you all for submitting your questions. We are working to update the how to apply documents, the frequently asked questions, and the PSLF fact sheet that is on our website, on our PSLF page

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I appreciate these questions in particular, because I'll be using them to help actually update that frequently asked questions form. So, thank you for submitting them. That's not to say that your exact question will be on that form, but

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those topics and general questions identified are going to be very beneficial for us to try to answer more broadly for folks. So, thank you very much for attending today, and for sticking with us this long, and look out for our

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Recording and our, slide deck in the next week or so, in your email, and that'll also include links to our website and our complaints form if you need it. So, thank you very much again for joining us, and we'll see you at the next one

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Bye-bye, everyone.