

Elizabeth (Beth) Whelan Loan Forgiveness Remarks
School Nurse, Richmond Elementary School
\$65,000 Loan Forgiveness

Prepared remarks for April 8, 2024

A career in public health, serving an under-served community, has been an impactful way for me to make a difference, and it's why I chose school nursing. Every day I go to work knowing that I will be able to provide expert care for really terrific kids. The needs of the young people at my school, Richmond Elementary, vary from day to day, and nearly 30% of our student population has asthma. I like to be there to support our students in any way I can.

I started at the School District in 2007 on an emergency certification, and needed to pursue further course work to be permitted to continue my practice. When I went to pursue my master's degree, I chose public health nursing because I felt that it would be most beneficial for the young people I serve. But for me, it also meant accruing significant debt.

Coupled with my remaining undergraduate loans, I was paying hundreds of dollars a month and barely making ends meet for my family. I could have gone and worked elsewhere— at a hospital where the pay is much higher—but I believe in this work. I believe in public education as a public good, and I believe in my students' right to have quality nursing services every day. So I kept with it. And I kept paying off the loans month after month.

Recently, I lost my father. And I will never forget a conversation I had with him shortly before his death. He asked me if I was going to be ok financially. I'd just gotten word that **\$65,000** in loans had been completely zeroed out. I owed nothing more. And I told him that. The relief I saw in his eyes was everything. I wanted him to have that sense of peace, to know that I'd be ok.

And now, I am caring for my mother, and this summer will actually be the first summer that I've not had to work—and I will be able to tend to her and help support her. I no longer have to work night and weekend shifts with an outside agency. I can focus on my work at Richmond, and on my family.

I am grateful for the impact this incredible program has had on my family, and how it's allowed me to continue to work in the District.