

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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SENATE BILL 578

Short Title: North Carolina CARDINAL Corps Act. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Chitlik and Lowe (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

March 26, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE NORTH CAROLINA CARDINAL CORPS ACT TO PLACE
INDIVIDUALS IN JOB POSITIONS IN CRITICAL, HIGH-NEED SECTORS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Fellowship Program Established. – There is established the North Carolina Communities Advancing Real Development by Investing in Newly Accomplished Leaders, or CARDINAL, Corps Program (Program) to expand opportunities for selected individuals by providing fellowship funds to support entry into critical, high-need sectors facing shortages including disaster relief and recovery, education, public safety, public service, farming and food security, and services to military families and veterans. The program shall (i) allow host recipients, including businesses, schools, local governments, and private nonprofit organizations, to participate in fellowships to meet their needs, assist with financial challenges, and ease employment demands in their local communities, and (ii) provide opportunities to fellows that can lead to certifications, licensing, or an associate degree in a career field and, ultimately, full-time employment.

SECTION 2. Implementation. – A host recipient is eligible for reimbursement of funds used for a fellowship if the host offers a qualifying fellowship to an individual who is either within the first two years immediately following (i) high school graduation or completion of general education development (GED) or (ii) a United States military deployment. Fellowships that fit the following descriptions are qualifying fellowships:

- (1) Disaster relief and recovery. – Supporting governments, nonprofit organizations, or faith-based organizations in mobilizing resources for disaster relief and recovery in the State.
- (2) Education. – Supporting local school districts, nonprofit organizations, or faith-based organizations in working as a tutor, early childhood education assistant, or after school program assistant.
- (3) Public safety. – Supporting local police or sheriff departments, nonprofit organizations, or faith-based organizations in working to reduce crime or support victims of crime.
- (4) Public service. – Supporting county or municipal governments.
- (5) Farming and food security. – Supporting small-scale farmers, coalitions, nonprofit organizations, or faith-based organizations in supporting small-scale farmers and increasing food security.
- (6) Military families and veterans. – Supporting the Veterans Administration, groups on military bases, professional organizations, fraternal organizations,



or nonprofit organizations doing in bolstering active-duty military and their families, Gold Star families, or veterans.

SECTION 3. Use of Funds. – The NCWorks Commission of the Department of Commerce shall administer the fellowship program established under this act for host recipients that are businesses, schools, local governments, or private nonprofit organizations conducting business in this State and that offer qualifying fellowships to individuals. The funds appropriated for the program shall be allocated by the Commission to host recipients as follows:

- (1) Fifty percent (50%) of the funds shall be allocated for the salary and program expenses of fellows that are in their first two years immediately following high school graduation or completion of general education development (GED).
- (2) Fifty percent (50%) of the funds shall be allocated for the salary and program expenses of fellows that are in their first two years immediately following a military deployment.

Upon matching funds being made available by a host recipient in accordance with Section 4 of this act, host recipients may be reimbursed for up to thirty thousand two hundred dollars (\$30,200) per fellow each fiscal year for program expenses, including program equipment, expenses associated with payroll, mentor stipends, insurance, training, uniforms, safety equipment, and for the salary and completion award of fellows.

SECTION 4. Matching Funds for Fellowship Cost. – Funds made available to host recipients for program expenses, salary, and the completion award of fellows shall be matched on the basis of one dollar (\$1.00) in non-State funds for every one dollar (\$1.00) in State funds. Fellows participating in the grant program paid with matching State funds shall be limited to a weekly rate of pay of six hundred dollars (\$600.00). Each fellowship shall be for a period of nine consecutive months, upon which fellows shall also be paid a completion award of five thousand dollars (\$5,000).

SECTION 5. Fellows Conference. – The NCWorks Commission shall host a biannual conference of fellows at a location in the State determined in the discretion of the Commission. The Commission shall invite all individuals who are engaged in fellowships or who have completed fellowships since the last conference and shall provide an agenda that supports training and guidance in career development and permanent employment opportunities for fellows. Of the funds appropriated under this act, the Commission may use up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000) per fellow per year for the biannual fellows conferences.

SECTION 6. Report. – The NCWorks Commission shall submit a report by June 15, 2026, and each year of the program thereafter, to the Senate Committee on Commerce and Insurance, the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development, and the Fiscal Research Division on the fellowship program and the use of funds for each type of qualifying fellowship under Section 2 of this act, matching funds provided by host recipients, as well as salary data.

SECTION 7. Intent. – It is the intent of the General Assembly to continue growing the Program at a rate of an additional 100 fellows per year until 1,000 individuals are participating annually, at which level it is the intent of the General Assembly to maintain the Program.

SECTION 8. Appropriation. – There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Commerce the sum of one million four hundred eighty-five thousand dollars (\$1,485,000) in nonrecurring funds to implement the Program in accordance with this act. The Department of Commerce is encouraged to seek philanthropic contributions from private foundations to supplant these funds to the extent possible.

SECTION 9. This act becomes effective July 1, 2025.