# The 2026 Federal Student Loan Changes

What changed on July 1, what it means for PSLF, and the one mistake that costs a physician a year of credit.

### The 60-second version

SAVE was eliminated. The Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP) replaced it and **does** qualify for PSLF. The new Tiered Standard Plan **does not**. PSLF itself is unchanged — still 120 qualifying payments. If you were on SAVE and have not actively chosen a new plan, you may be making payments that earn no PSLF credit.

## 1. What actually happened

The Saving on a Valuable Education plan was eliminated following an extended court battle. From July 1, 2026, servicers began notifying enrolled borrowers, who were given a 90-day window to select a different repayment plan. The Department of Education introduced two new plans alongside that change: the Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP) and a Tiered Standard Plan.

## 2. PSLF did not change — but qualifying plans did

Public Service Loan Forgiveness remains intact. The 120-payment, ten-year structure is unchanged, and physicians at qualifying nonprofit and government employers have the same path they had before. What changed is which repayment plans generate qualifying payments.

| Plan | Still available? | Counts toward PSLF? |
|---|---|---|
| SAVE | No — eliminated | — |
| RAP (new) | Yes, from July 1, 2026 | Yes |
| Tiered Standard (new) | Yes | **No** |
| IBR | Yes | Yes |
| PAYE / ICR | Closing after July 1, 2028 | Yes, until closure |

### The expensive mistake

A physician placed on the Tiered Standard Plan keeps paying every month and earns **zero** PSLF credit. Nothing about the payment looks wrong. The gap only surfaces when the payment count is checked — often years later.

## 3. The timeline you are operating against

- **Now:** SAVE borrowers had 90 days from servicer notification to choose a new plan.
- **July 1, 2026:** Borrowers taking new federal loans on or after this date have only two options — Tiered Standard and RAP.
- **July 1, 2028:** PAYE and ICR close. IBR and RAP become the only income-driven plans.

YOUR ACTION LIST

# Four things to check this month

## 1. Confirm which plan you are actually on

Log into your servicer account and read it off the screen — not what you remember choosing. Migration and administrative forbearance during the litigation moved a great many borrowers without their close attention.

## 2. Verify your PSLF payment count

Check the count directly rather than assuming. If it looks lower than your months of qualifying employment, resolve that gap now. Month 118 is a bad time to discover it.

## 3. Re-certify employment if it has been over a year

Use the PSLF Help Tool at StudentAid.gov. Annual certification is the cheapest insurance available on a ten-year commitment.

## 4. Re-run the forgiveness-versus-refinance math

If you are at a nonprofit or government employer, forgiveness is usually the stronger path and residency counts. If you are in private practice with no qualifying employer, the analysis shifts to refinancing or payoff — and refinancing federal loans permanently forfeits access to PSLF and income-driven plans.

### A caution about older guidance

A great deal of physician student-loan content published before mid-2026 — some of it still ranking well in search — recommends SAVE as the default for residents. That advice is now actively harmful. Check the publication date on anything you read about federal repayment, and verify against StudentAid.gov.

### Sources

U.S. Department of Education / StudentAid.gov · NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, “Key Changes in Federal Student Loan Repayment” · The College of New Jersey Office of Financial Aid, “Update on Federal Loan Changes Beginning in 2026” · Tate Law, “PSLF Changes in 2026” and “What’s Happening to IDR Plans in 2026.” Figures and program rules current as of August 7, 2026. Federal loan rules change; verify against the primary source before acting.

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Attend Wealth · 999 Peachtree St NE, Suite 400, Atlanta, GA 30309 · attendwealth.com · (281) 541-4808