

HB 496 -- FIRST RESPONDER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ACT

SPONSOR: Christ

This bill establishes the "First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act" to provide free college tuition for first responders and their legal dependents. The bill defines a "first responder" as any person who is trained and authorized by law or rule to render emergency medical assistance or treatment, including, but not limited to, police officers, firefighters, paramedics, and other professionals specified in the bill.

A first responder will be entitled to a waiver of 100% of the resident tuition charges of a public institution of higher education if the first responder presents to the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) verification of his or her current, valid license in a profession specified in the bill, if applicable, along with a certificate of verification signed by his or her employer verifying that the individual is a first responder who is trained and authorized to render emergency medical assistance or treatment. The first responder must meet all admission requirements of the public institution of higher education and pursue an associate degree or baccalaureate degree that relates to a career as a first responder. Each year the first responder or legal dependent applies for and receives the tuition waiver, the first responder will file with DHEWD documentation showing proof of employment as a first responder and proof of residence in Missouri.

A legal dependent of a first responder is also eligible for a tuition waiver if he or she executes an agreement with the public institution of higher education he or she attends outlining the terms and conditions of the tuition waiver, including the legal dependent's commitment to reside in Missouri for the next five years, as well as a commitment to provide a copy of his or her state income tax return annually to DHEWD in order to prove his or her residency in Missouri. The agreement must also include a provision that if the tuition waiver recipient fails to provide proof of residency in Missouri for the five-year period following the use of the tuition waiver, he or she must repay the public institution of higher education the amount of tuition that was waived. Finally, the agreement will provide that any residency, filing, or payment obligation incurred by the tuition waiver recipient under the bill is canceled in the event of the tuition waiver recipient's total and permanent disability or death.

The legal dependent must satisfy certain other criteria to be eligible for a tuition waiver. The legal dependent must not have previously earned a baccalaureate degree, and he or she must meet

all admission requirements of the public institution of higher education he or she wishes to attend. The legal dependent will also complete and submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid and provide verification of the first responder's eligibility for the tuition waiver to the public institution of higher education, as provided in the bill.

A first responder or his or her legal dependent may receive a tuition waiver under the bill for up to five years if he or she otherwise continues to be eligible for the waiver. The five years of tuition waiver eligibility starts once the first responder or his or her legal dependent applies for and receives the tuition waiver for the first time and is available to the first responder or legal dependent for the next five consecutive years.

A public institution of higher education must waive 100% of the first responder's or legal dependent's tuition remaining due after subtracting awarded federal financial aid grants and state scholarships and grants for an eligible first responder or legal dependent.

This bill is the same as SB 71 (2025).