

HCS HBs 1514, 1525 & 1527 -- COLLEGE TUITION FOR PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL

SPONSOR: Hinman

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Emerging Issues by a vote of 10 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Legislative by a vote of 9 to 1.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HBs 1514, 1525 & 1527.

This bill establishes the "Public Safety Recruitment and Retention Act", to provide free college tuition for certain public safety personnel and their legal dependents.

The bill defines "public safety personnel" as including any police officer, firefighter, paramedic, emergency medical dispatcher, emergency medical technician, or advanced emergency medical technician who is trained and authorized by law or rule to render emergency medical assistance or treatment.

Subject to appropriation, public safety personnel with at least six years of service must be entitled to a waiver of 100% of the resident tuition charges of a public institution of higher education if they present to the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) verification of their current, valid license in a profession specified in the bill, along with a certificate of verification signed by their employer verifying that they are employed full-time as public safety personnel.

Such individuals must also meet all admission requirements of the public institution of higher education and pursue an associate or baccalaureate degree in an academic subject specified in the bill. Individuals who have already earned a baccalaureate degree are ineligible to use the tuition waiver to earn another degree.

Each year an individual applies for and receives a tuition waiver, he or she must file with DHEWD documentation showing proof of employment and proof of residence in Missouri. Additionally, an applicant for a tuition waiver must first apply for all other forms of Federal and State student financial aid and provide evidence of such to the public institution of higher education. (Section 173.2655, RSMo)

The legal dependent of public safety personnel with at least ten years of service is also eligible for a tuition waiver if he or she executes an agreement with the public institution of higher education 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 provide a copy of his or her state income tax return annually to DHEWD in order to prove residency in Missouri.

The agreement will 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. Any such repayment received will be remitted by the institution to DHEWD in full or deducted from future reimbursements to the institution from the Public Safety Recruitment and Retention Fund created in the bill, as determined in accordance with rules promulgated by DHEWD. 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 five-year residency requirement for a legal dependent who receives a tuition waiver begins once the legal dependent applies for and receives the tuition waiver and continues until the tuition waiver recipient:

- (1) Completes the five-year tuition waiver eligibility period;
- (2) Completes a baccalaureate degree;
- (3) Completes an associate degree and notifies DHEWD that he or she does not intend to pursue a baccalaureate degree or additional associate degree using tuition waivers; or
- (4) Notifies DHEWD that he or she does not plan to use additional tuition waivers.

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 must also complete and submit a United States Department of Education Free Application for Federal Student Aid and provide verification of the public safety personnel's eligibility for the tuition waiver to the public institution of higher education, as provided in the bill. (Sections 173.2655 and 173.2660)

Public safety personnel and their legal dependents can receive a tuition waiver for up to five consecutive years if they otherwise continue to be eligible. The five years of eligibility starts once

the public safety personnel or legal dependent applies for and receives the tuition waiver for the first time.

A public institution of higher education will waive 100% of the individual's tuition remaining due after subtracting awarded federal financial aid grants and state scholarships and grants. An application for a tuition waiver must include a verification of the public safety personnel's satisfaction of the requirements of the bill, including proof of full-time employment and residency status. Public safety personnel will include such verification when they or their legal dependents are applying to a public institution of higher education in order to obtain a tuition waiver upon initial enrollment.

The death of public safety personnel in the line of duty will not disqualify an individual's otherwise eligible legal dependent from receiving the tuition waiver. In such a case, in lieu of submitting verification of the public safety personnel's employment, the legal dependent must submit a statement attesting that, at the time of death, the public safety personnel satisfied the requirements of the bill, and such individual died in the line of duty, as described in the bill.

Completed applications for a tuition waiver must be submitted to DHEWD by December 15th and by March 1st annually, the public institution of higher education will send written notice of the applicant's eligibility or ineligibility for the tuition waiver and state whether the application has been approved or denied.

If the applicant is determined not to be eligible for the tuition waiver or the application is denied, the notice must include the reason or reasons for such determination or denial.

The bill creates the "Public Safety Recruitment and Retention Fund" for the purposes of reimbursing public institutions of higher education for awarding the tuition waivers. In the event that funds are insufficient to provide tuition waivers for all eligible applicants, public safety personnel will be in the first class of applicants to receive the waivers, and dependents will be in the second class, in a priority order specified in the bill. (Section 173.2655)

The current "Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant" provides grants for tuition and fees for eligible students meeting specific eligibility and income requirements. The bill adds public safety personnel and personnel's dependents to the eligible students without income restrictions. No individual or dependent who receives a fast track grant will be eligible to receive an award

for tuition charges under the "Public Safety Recruitment and Retention Act". (Section 173.2553)

This bill is similar to SCS SB 71 (2025) and HB 496 (2025).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that this will help to support current law enforcement, and to recruit and train new officers. Supporters further say that the cost of education, whether books, tuition, or other fees, can be cost prohibitive when contemplating a career, and that this bill will incentivize individuals to seek jobs in the service of public safety.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Hinman; Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Chris Hoffman, Jefferson County Sheriff's Office; Chris Schoeman, St. Louis County Police Association; Missouri Community College Association; Missouri Ambulance Association; Council on Public Higher Education; Missouri Association of Career Fire Protection Districts.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.