

Tuition Waiver Fact Sheet



Summary

By law, spouses and eligible children of LEOFF 2 members who are killed or catastrophically disabled in the line of duty are entitled to a mandatory tuition waiver from Washington state-supported colleges and universities.

The language under this waiver law may appear simplistic, but it's not. Although mandatory, there are circumstances where the tuition waiver does not pay for everything. This can lead to confusion, frustration, and stress for students who were counting on the waiver to cover the full cost of higher education.

This fact sheet is designed to assist eligible students in understanding and obtaining tuition waivers.

Why Waivers Don't Pay for Everything

Definition of Tuition

The higher education exemption law, RCW 28B.15.380, uses the term "tuition", stating that all tuition and services and activities fees will be exempt for spouses and eligible child of LEOFF 2 members killed or catastrophically disabled in the line of duty.

The word tuition is defined under RCW 28B.15.020 and includes "operating fees" and "building fees". Under this definition, students will find some common fees not covered by the waiver. These include, but are not limited to:

- self-supporting degree programs and courses
- short courses
- marine station work
- experimental station work
- correspondence or extension courses
- individual instruction, student deposits or rentals
- disciplinary and library fines
- laboratory fees
- gymnasium fees
- health fees
- technology fees
- income from rooms, dormitories and dining halls
- hospitals and infirmaries
- housing or student activity buildings
- vehicular parking facilities
- land
- or such other special fees as may be established by any college or university board of trustees or regents from time to time

Understanding Self-supported Programs and Courses

In 2010 when the mandatory waiver was put in place for community and technical schools, institutes of higher education were receiving a bulk of their budgets from the state. These funds were used to cover operating costs and keep the cost of student tuition down. At that time, a majority of programs and courses were state-supported and included in the tuition waiver.

Since then, the state has significantly decreased contributions to higher education. This has shifted the burden of paying for higher education from the state to students. Therefore, some programs and courses that had been state-supported are now self-supported through tuition and excluded from the tuition waiver.

Schools have discretion in deciding which courses and programs are budgeted into each category (state supported vs. self-supported) but are required to report changes.

Generally speaking, core classes continue to be state supported.

Working With Schools to Obtain a Waiver

Advocate for Yourself

During the admissions process, regardless of whether or not it is required – write an essay. Introduce yourself and explain your circumstances.

Your high school grades may have slipped and you may not have had as many activities as other students you are competing with. Telling your story will help the school see the big picture.

Know Who to Talk To

Admissions is the first place to start. The Registrar and Financial Aid offices are also great resources. Many schools use their Veterans departments to make waiver determinations.

Make your advisor aware of your waiver needs so they can assist in finding qualifying classes.

Questions to Ask

Some programs may be covered by the waiver in one school, but not at another. Ask if the specific program you are interested in is covered. You may also want to consider attending in the summer; will that be covered? Online classes? Extension classes?

Is the school willing to provide an optional waiver for things that aren't covered under the mandatory waiver?

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is considered an eligible child for this waiver?

1) a natural born child; 2) a stepchild where that relationship was in existence prior to the date LEOFF benefits are payable; 3) a posthumous child; 4) a child legally adopted or made a legal ward of a member prior to the date LEOFF benefits are payable; or 5) an illegitimate child legitimized prior to the date LEOFF benefits are payable.

What time limitations are associated with the waiver?

There are no time limitations for spouses, however, dependents must begin their course of study within ten years of graduation from high school. Additionally, there are no marital status limitations for spouses or dependents.

Does the waiver apply to graduate degrees?

According to the Attorney General's Office (AGO), the waiver is required for undergraduate degrees, but does not specifically address graduate degrees. The AGO concludes that it is likely the waiver would also apply to graduate and professional degrees. Ask your school. If they say no, contact us for assistance.

Is the waiver subject to the school's satisfactory progress policy for financial aid?

No, however students would be required to meet the school's academic requirements.

How do I file a complaint about my waiver determination?

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) has authority to investigate student complaints against specific state-funded schools. If you feel that a school is not properly applying a waiver, you may file a complaint online at:

www.wsac.wa.gov.

More Questions?

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