

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to the Educational Dollars for Duty
3 program; providing a short title; transferring,
4 renumbering, and amending s. 250.10(7) and (8), F.S.;
5 requiring the program to set aside a certain amount of
6 funds to provide tuition assistance to spouses and
7 children of active members of the Florida National
8 Guard; authorizing the Legislature to increase the
9 amount of such funds; requiring the Department of
10 Military Affairs to oversee implementation and
11 enforcement of the program; requiring the department
12 to establish certain procedures; providing an
13 effective date.

14
15 WHEREAS, members of the Florida National Guard who are
16 deployed to respond to emergencies are frequently taken away
17 from their families for significant periods of time, and

18 WHEREAS, a National Guard member's overseas deployments and
19 service during natural disasters can often leave the member's
20 family disadvantaged without the relied-upon support of the
21 family member while the member is away serving Florida or our
22 nation, and

23 WHEREAS, providing educational support to the families of
24 National Guard members will offer significant relief and support
25 to these dedicated individuals, NOW, THEREFORE,

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. This act may be cited as the "Educational Dollars for Duty Program Expansion Act."

Section 2. Present subsections (7) and (8) of section 250.10, Florida Statutes, are transferred and renumbered as section 250.101, Florida Statutes, and subsection (3) is added to that section, to read:

250.101 Educational Dollars for Duty program.—

(1)~~(7)~~ The Adjutant General shall develop an education assistance program for members in good standing of the Florida National Guard who enroll in an authorized course of study at a public or nonpublic postsecondary institution or technical center in the state which has been accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the United States Department of Education or licensed by the Commission for Independent Education. Education assistance also may be used for training to obtain industry certifications approved by the Department of Education pursuant to s. 1008.44 and continuing education to maintain license certifications. The education assistance program shall be known as the Educational Dollars for Duty program (EDD).

(a) The program shall establish application requirements, including, but not limited to, requirements that the applicant:

1. Be 17 years of age or older.

51 2. Be presently domiciled in the state.

52 3. Be an active drilling member and in good standing in
53 the Florida National Guard at the beginning of and throughout
54 the entire academic term for which benefits are received.

55 4. Maintain continuous satisfactory participation in the
56 Florida National Guard for the school term for which benefits
57 are received.

58 5. Upon enrollment in the program, complete a memorandum
59 of agreement to:

60 a. Comply with the rules of the program.

61 b. Serve in the Florida National Guard for the period
62 specified in the member's enlistment or reenlistment contract.

63 c. Authorize the release of information pursuant to
64 subparagraph (d)6. by the postsecondary institution or technical
65 center to the education service office of the Department of
66 Military Affairs, subject to applicable federal and state law.

67 (b) The program shall define those members of the Florida
68 National Guard who are ineligible to participate in the program
69 and those courses of study which are not authorized for the
70 program.

71 1. Ineligible members include, but are not limited to, a
72 member, commissioned officer, warrant officer, or enlisted
73 person who has obtained a master's degree using the program.

74 2. Inactive members of the Florida National Guard and
75 members of the Individual Ready Reserve are not eligible to

76 | participate in the program.

77 | 3. Courses not authorized include noncredit courses,
78 | courses that do not meet degree requirements, courses that do
79 | not meet requirements for completion of career training, or
80 | other courses as determined by program definitions.

81 | 4. The program may not pay repeat course fees.

82 | (c) The program may include, but is not limited to:

83 | 1. Courses at a public or nonpublic postsecondary
84 | institution or technical center in the state which is accredited
85 | by an accrediting body recognized by the United States
86 | Department of Education or licensed by the Commission for
87 | Independent Education.

88 | 2. Training to obtain industry certifications, limited to
89 | certifications approved by the Department of Education under s.
90 | 1008.44.

91 | 3. Continuing education to maintain a license or
92 | certification. Notwithstanding subparagraph (b)1., members who
93 | have obtained a master's degree using the program are eligible
94 | for funding under this subparagraph.

95 | 4. Licensing and industry certification examination fees.
96 | Notwithstanding subparagraph (b)1., members who have obtained a
97 | master's degree using the program are eligible for funding under
98 | this subparagraph.

99 | 5. Notwithstanding subparagraph (b)3., developmental
100 | educational courses.

101 (d) The Adjutant General shall adopt rules for the overall
102 policy, guidance, administration, implementation, and proper use
103 of the program. Such rules must include, but need not be limited
104 to:

105 1. Guidelines for certification by the Adjutant General of
106 a guard member's eligibility.

107 2. Procedures for notification to a postsecondary
108 institution or technical center of a guard member's termination
109 of eligibility.

110 3. Guidelines for approving courses of study that are
111 authorized for the program, including online courses, industry
112 certification training, and continuing education to maintain
113 license certifications.

114 4. Guidelines for approving the use of program funds for
115 licensing and industry certification examination fees.

116 5. Procedures for restitution when a guard member fails to
117 comply with the penalties described in this section.

118 6. Procedures that require a public or nonpublic
119 postsecondary institution or technical center that receives
120 funding from the program to provide information regarding course
121 enrollment, course withdrawal, course cancellation, course
122 completion, course failure, and grade verification of enrolled
123 members to the education service office of the Department of
124 Military Affairs.

125 7. Guidelines for the payment of tuition and fees, not to

126 exceed the highest in-state tuition rate charged by a public
127 postsecondary institution in the state.

128 (2)~~(8)~~ Subject to appropriations, the Department of
129 Military Affairs may pay the full cost of tuition and fees for
130 required courses for current members of the Florida National
131 Guard. Members are eligible to use the program upon enlistment
132 in the Florida National Guard. If a member is enrolled in a
133 nonpublic postsecondary education institution or a nonpublic
134 vocational-technical program, the Department of Military Affairs
135 shall pay an amount that may not exceed the rate of the highest
136 in-state tuition and fees at a public postsecondary education
137 institution or public vocational-technical program.

138 (a) The Adjutant General shall give preference and
139 priority to eligible members who have deployed on federal
140 military orders while a member of the Florida National Guard.

141 (b) The Department of Military Affairs may reimburse a
142 member for student textbook and instructional material costs in
143 accordance with limits set each fiscal year based on funding
144 availability and regardless of the source of tuition funding,
145 but only after tuition and fees for all eligible members are
146 paid for that fiscal year.

147 (c) Penalties for noncompliance with program requirements
148 include, but are not limited to, the following:

149 1. If a member of the Florida National Guard receives
150 payment of tuition and fees for an academic term and fails to

151 maintain satisfactory participation in the Florida National
152 Guard during that academic term, the member shall reimburse the
153 Department of Military Affairs all tuition charges and student
154 fees for the academic term for which the member received
155 payment.

156 2. If a member of the Florida National Guard leaves the
157 Florida National Guard during the period specified in the
158 member's enlistment or reenlistment contract, the member shall
159 reimburse the Department of Military Affairs all tuition charges
160 and student fees for which the member received payments,
161 regardless of whether the obligation to reimburse the department
162 was incurred before, on, or after July 1, 2009, unless the
163 Adjutant General finds that there are justifiable extenuating
164 circumstances.

165 3. If the service of a member of the Florida National
166 Guard is terminated or the member is placed on scholastic
167 probation while receiving payments, the member shall reimburse
168 the Department of Military Affairs all tuition charges and
169 student fees for the academic term for which the member received
170 payment.

171 4. If a member defaults on any reimbursement made under
172 this paragraph, the department may charge the member the maximum
173 interest rate authorized by law.

174 (3) (a) The Educational Dollars for Duty program shall set
175 aside \$500,000 of existing funds each fiscal year to provide

176 financial assistance for up to 50 percent of the cost of tuition
177 to spouses and children of active members of the Florida
178 National Guard. The amount set aside may be increased by the
179 Legislature as deemed necessary.

180 (b) The Department of Military Affairs shall oversee the
181 implementation and enforcement of this subsection. The
182 department shall establish procedures for verifying eligibility
183 and distributing funds.

184 **Section 3.** This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.