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Notice Number

New Jersey Department of Community Affairs
Division of Local Government Services

10/12/99

Date

LOCAL FINANCE NOTICE

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DIRECTOR

VOLUNTEER TUITION CREDIT PROGRAM P.L.1998, c.145

Earlier this year, P.L. 1998, c.145 was enacted as another tool to enhance government's ability to recruit and retain local volunteer fire, rescue and first aid organization members.

Known as the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program, it covers members of a volunteer organization who are active and in good standing, their spouse, and their dependent children. The law defines a volunteer organization as a volunteer fire company, or a first aid, or rescue squad association. They are allowed to enroll in postsecondary courses on a tuition credit basis in specific learning institutions: county colleges, county vocational schools or county technical institutes. A dependant child shall be any student who does not meet any of the eligibility criteria listed in N.J.S.A. 9A: 9-2.6(a) or (b) for independant student status.

Each volunteer is eligible to receive tuition credit in the amount of \$600 per year, not to exceed a maximum of \$2,400 over a four year service period, provided that classroom space is available and that tuition paying students constitute the minimum number required for the course.

This Notice reviews the law, how it works, responsibilities of the parties, and includes a copy of the law and model forms. It has been prepared jointly by the Division of Local Government Services and the Division of Fire Safety.

Procedures

To participate in the program, the municipality must pass a resolution (VTC-1) allowing the governing body to enact the Program along with delegating the responsibility of record maintenance and authorization of volunteer participation to a municipal employee. The volunteer must agree to serve as a member of a volunteer organization (as described above) for a minimum of four years. While the date the law took effect, December 23, 1998, serves as the starting date for calculating service time, a volunteer with one or more years of prior service will be allowed up to twelve months credit for eligibility in the first year of the program. This is done by the volunteer signing a service pledge agreement with the municipality in which the volunteer organization is located. Filing with the municipal government is required for all volunteers, whether or not there is a fire district in the municipality.

Following each year of active volunteer services, the volunteer organization must provide the municipality with a letter verifying that the volunteer has been a member in good standing for the past twelve month period. Volunteers serving more than one emergency service organization are eligible to enroll and receive the benefits of more than one tuition credit program. There is also no limit to the number of volunteers within a household that may be eligible for this program.

Director's Office
(609) 292-6613

Local Government
Research
(609) 292-6110

Financial Regulation
and Assistance
(609) 292-4806

Local Finance
Board
(609) 292-0479

Local Management
Services
(609) 292-7842

Authority Regulation
(609) 984-0132

Fax
(609) 984-7388

Upon receipt of the verification the municipal official (i.e., the municipal clerk) shall issue a Certificate of Authorization to be presented to the learning institution by the volunteer or eligible family member(s) during the enrollment period. If registration is authorized, the learning institution will debit the tuition amount of the course on the lower portion of the certificate and maintain a running balance for other courses taken during the year.

The volunteer, spouse or dependent child must maintain a minimum "C", "2.0" or "pass" average in order to continue eligibility in the tuition credit program. In the event a course is graded "pass/fail", a grade of "pass" will suffice. The volunteer must document this by providing the municipal clerk with a copy of the student's transcript upon completion of each course cycle or semester. It is the sole responsibility of the volunteer and the volunteer organization to provide the municipal clerk with the documents necessary to maintain eligibility in this program. Misrepresentation or the providing of false information in attempt to gain enrollment will result in suspension from the program for a period of four years.

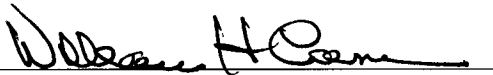
Required Documents

The program requires several documents to be completed by the various parties. DCA has prepared model documents that may be used, including:


- 1) Municipal Resolution (VTC-1): a formal statement allowing the municipality to participate in the Program along with designating an authorized representative to maintain the Program files and to authorize volunteer participation on behalf of the governing body.
- 2) Service Pledge Agreement (VTC-2): a pledge signed by the volunteer indicating that the volunteer will serve as a member of a volunteer organization for a minimum of four years in exchange for the tuition credit.
- 3) Verification of Performed Service (VTC-3): following each year of volunteer service performed, the administrative board of the volunteer organization shall submit, upon a volunteer's request, a letter of verification to the municipality in which the volunteer successfully completed one year of service. The organization may submit a "blanket letter" (VTC-4) listing more than one name, however, a copy shall be placed in each member's file.
- 4) Certificate of Authorization (VTC-5): a document signed and sealed by the municipal official that includes the name of the volunteer organization, the maximum credit allowed for a one year period, name of volunteer and eligible family members, signature of volunteer and date of issue. Reproduction of the form is prohibited and any year end unused balance is void and non-transferable. Learning institutions are urged to utilize the lower portion for tracking expended tuition costs.

While the State does not have formal rule-making authority over this program, DCA has met with representatives of all concerned parties, consulted with the Attorney General's office, and developed the model forms. We urge their use.

The services performed by our volunteer firemen, first aid and rescue personnel are invaluable assets to our communities. We hope this program will fulfill its intention of enhancing the membership of our voluntary emergency organizations by offering tuition credit as an incentive for retaining and recruiting qualified members of the community. If you have any questions on this program, please contact us at 609-292-7842.



William H. Cane, Director
Division of Fire Safety



Ulrich H. Steinberg, Jr., Director
Division of Local Government Services

Enclosures

Distribution: Municipal Clerks, Volunteer Fire Companies and Volunteer First Aid Organizations

Volunteer Tuition Credit Program

P.L. 1998, Chapter 145

C.18A:71-78.1 Tuition-free enrollment in postsecondary program for certain volunteers, family members.

1. A person who is an active member of a volunteer fire company or volunteer first aid or rescue squad or association in good standing and the dependent children and spouse of a volunteer shall be allowed to enroll in a postsecondary program on a tuition-free basis in county college, county vocational school or county technical institute and be eligible to receive tuition credit in an amount not to exceed a maximum of \$2,400 for the member, children and spouse; provided that available classroom space permits and that tuition paying students constitute the minimum number required for the course. Nothing herein shall preclude a county college, county vocational school or county technical institute from requiring registration and lab fees for individuals attending courses pursuant to this act.

C.18A:71-78.2 Eligibility for tuition credit.

2. In order to be eligible to receive tuition credit at a county college, county vocational school or county technical institute, a person shall agree to serve as a member of a volunteer fire company or volunteer first aid or rescue squad or association for a minimum of four years and sign an agreement with the municipality in which the squad or association is located pledging four years of service in exchange for the tuition credit. Following each year of volunteer service performed, the volunteer or the spouse or dependent children shall be entitled to receive tuition credit of up to \$600, not to exceed a maximum of \$2,400 for the member, children and spouse over a four-year service period.

C.18A:71-78.3 Verification of service; transcript records.

3. Upon being accepted and enrolled in a county college, county vocational school or county technical institute, the volunteer, dependent child or spouse shall provide verification to the institution that the volunteer has performed the service required for the tuition credit. Upon completion of each semester, the volunteer shall submit a transcript to the municipality to be maintained in a permanent record. The volunteer or the dependent child or spouse shall maintain a "C" grade average in order to continue eligibility for the tuition credit program.

C.18A:71-78.4 Issuance of letter of eligibility.

4. A municipality which chooses to participate in the tuition credit program shall issue a letter of eligibility to the volunteer, to be presented to the appropriate institution, stating that the individual is a member in good standing of a volunteer fire company, volunteer first aid or rescue squad or association.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

New Jersey Volunteer Tuition Credit Program Summary of Recommended Procedures

The following summarizes the key steps involved in implementing and running the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program in a municipality.

1. The municipality must pass a resolution (VTC-1) which allows the governing body to enact the Program and assign a municipal official responsibility for maintaining the Program files and authorizing volunteer participation.
2. An eligible fire or emergency medical volunteer signs the Service Pledge Agreement (VTC-2) form in the municipality in which the volunteer organization is located, pledging 4 years of service. The form is signed by the head of the volunteer organization. The volunteer then files it with the municipal official assigned the responsibility for the program.
3. Following each year of service, the volunteer organization sends a letter of verification (VTC-3 or VTC-4) to the municipality at the request of the volunteer or on behalf of all eligible volunteers.
4. The first requests for the letter of verification may come at any time after one year of service has been earned by a volunteer.
5. The assigned municipal official then issues a signed and sealed Certificate of Authorization (VTC-5) to the volunteer. The form can then be presented by the volunteer, spouse and dependant children to the learning institution during the enrollment period. Only the original form can be accepted.
6. Enrollment is limited to those classes where space is available and tuition paying students constitute the minimum number required for the course. The institution may wait until the last day of registration to determine space availability.
7. The learning institution will show the tuition amount on the lower portion of the certificate, and show a running balance for other courses taken during this period.
8. Upon completion of each semester or course cycle, the student must submit a transcript to the municipality which becomes part of the permanent file kept by the municipal official.
9. A student must maintain a grade of "C", "2.0" or "pass" in the courses taken under the Program to continue eligibility.
10. The municipality assumes no responsibility for the requisitioning of any supportive documents.
11. The Certificate of Authorization is an "original only" document. In the event of it's loss, it is not replaceable.

A Resolution for the _____ of _____
To support and participate in the
Volunteer Tuition Credit Program (P. L. 1998, c. 145)

WHEREAS, the (name of governing body) of the (name of municipality) in the county of _____, deems it appropriate to enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters and emergency medical volunteers in the (name of municipality); and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has enacted P. L. 1998, c. 145 which permits municipal governments to allow their firefighting and emergency medical volunteers to take advantage of the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program at no cost to the municipal government.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the (name of governing body) of the (name of municipality) in the County of _____ that the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program as set forth in P. L. 1998, c. 145 is herewith adopted for the volunteer firefighters and emergency medical volunteers in the municipality; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the (name or title of municipal official) is herewith delegated the responsibility to administer the program and is authorized to enter into all agreements and to maintain files of all documents as may be required under the P. L. 1998, c. 145, a copy of which is herewith made part of this resolution.

**State of New Jersey
Volunteer Tuition Credit Program
P. L. 1998, c.145
Service Pledge Agreement**

I, _____, agree to serve as an active volunteer member of the
(Print Name)

(Volunteer Organization)
for a minimum term of four (4) years.

I further agree to comply with the regulations, rules and by-laws that are applicable to this volunteer service organization and that I will, to the best of my ability, perform the duties required of me as a member.

Following each year of volunteer service, my spouse, dependant children and I are eligible to participate in the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program as set forth in N.J.S.A. 18A:71-78.1 et seq. I further understand that a "C", "2.0" or "pass" is required for the student to maintain program eligibility and that registration is on a space available basis.

Signature of President, Captain or Chief

Signature of Volunteer

Date

Date

**State of New Jersey
Volunteer Tuition Credit Program
P. L. 1998, c.145
Verification of Service Performed**

As of _____, _____,
(date) *(Name of Volunteer)*
has successfully completed one year of active volunteer service with the

(Name of Organization)

This letter is intended to serve as verification to the

(Name of Municipality)
that the volunteer has fulfilled the obligation as stated in the Service Pledge Agreement.
A copy of this letter is to remain in the volunteer's file along with the required documents
for the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program.

Signature of President, Captain or Chief *Signature of Secretary*

Date *Date*

**State of New Jersey
Volunteer Tuition Credit Program
P. L. 1998, c.145
Blanket Verification of Service Performed**

As of _____, the following individuals have completed one
(date)
year of active volunteer service with the:

_____ *(Name of Organization)*

This letter is intended to serve as verification to the:

_____ *(Name of Municipality)*

that the volunteers are fulfilling the obligations as stated in the Service Pledge Agreement required by N.J.S.A 18A:71-78.3. A copy of this letter is to remain in each of their files along with the required documents for the Volunteer Tuition Credit Program.

(List of Volunteers)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

_____ *Signature of President, Captain or Chief*

_____ *Signature of Secretary*

_____ *Date*

_____ *Date*

**State of New Jersey
Volunteer Tuition Credit Program
P. L. 1998, c. 145
Certificate of Authorization/Voucher**

The fire or emergency medical volunteer listed below, has completed one year of service with the:

_____.
(Name of Organization)

Pursuant to P.L. 1998, c. 145 (N.J.S.A. 18A:71-78.1), this voucher may be used by the volunteer and the volunteer's immediate family as payment for tuition at any county college, county vocational, or county technical school in the State of New Jersey on a space available basis. Pursuant to the law, this voucher is redeemable for up to \$600.00 of tuition credit. The institution may wait until the last day of registration to determine if space is available.

Name of Volunteer:

Names of eligible family members:

This certificate must have an original signature and be sealed by the Municipal Clerk, and may not be reproduced. It is good for a period of one (1) year from the date below. Any balance remaining is void and non-transferable.

Signature of Volunteer

Signature of Municipal Official

Date

Print Name of Municipality

VTC-5

Space below for educational institution use only:
