

SECTION Q. DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOSTER CHILD TUITION WAIVER AND FEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

PURPOSE:

In July 2008, the Massachusetts Legislature amended Chapter 15A, Section 19 of the General Laws. This law provides for full tuition and fee waivers for foster children in the custody of the Department of Children and Families and children adopted through this agency that choose to attend a Massachusetts public institution of higher education, and it requires the Board of Higher Education to establish guidelines for these waivers. Section 19 also states, "The Commonwealth, not the institutions of public higher education, shall bear the cost of these waivers, after all reimbursement from the federal government have been exhausted."

DEFINITIONS:

ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION:

An institution within the system of public higher education under Section 5 of Chapter 15A of the General Laws.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAM:

Any eligible state supported undergraduate degree or certificate program offered by the institution.

ELIGIBLE STUDENT:

Shall mean a student who has not earned a baccalaureate degree and meets the following conditions:

- Is a current or former foster child placed in the custody of the Department of Children and Families and remained in custody through age 18 without subsequently being returned home, or
- Is a child whose guardianship was sponsored by the Department of Children and Families through age 18;
- and who meet the following criteria:
 - a) Is a U.S. Citizen, permanent legal resident, or non-citizen eligible under Title IV regulations; or have an approved eligibility status designated by the Board of Higher Education pursuant to Section 9 of Chapter 15A, as amended by Section 11 of Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2023
 - b) Is under the age of twenty-five (25) at the start of the academic year
 - ~~c) Was in the custody of the Department of Children and Families for at least six months before age of 18~~
 - d) Completes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), or another state-approved equivalent form, annually for consideration of assistance by any designated deadline, as may be determined by the Department of Higher Education, and complies with financial aid verification requirements in either the FAFSA or the alternative state-approved form, as applicable
 - e) Is enrolled in an undergraduate degree, certificate or short-term certificate program, or is taking noncredit courses
 - f) Is not in default of any federal or state student loans for attendance at any institution or owes a refund for any previous financial aid received
 - g) Is in good standing and meets the institution's requirements for Satisfactory Academic Progress

ELIGIBLE COURSE:

Any state-supported course offered by an institution at a public college or university, excluding all graduate courses and courses in the M.D. program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Eligible courses include those toward an undergraduate degree program, certificate program, short-term certificate program, and non-credit courses. Institutions are encouraged to develop waiver programs for eligible students that would provide 50 percent tuition waiver for any non-state supported course and/or certificate program.

AWARD VALUE:

Subject to budgetary appropriation, the award under this program shall be equal to 100 percent of all billed tuition and fees, at the resident rate, as follows:

- a waiver of tuition for all students who qualify for tuition waivers under this section of the Commonwealth Tuition Waiver Guidelines, plus 100 percent of all fees for all state-supported courses or program of study.

In all cases, assistance under this program is awarded after consideration of all other federal scholarship and grant resources. Institutions may not use this tuition and fee assistance program to supplant other state, federal or institutional aid previously awarded to the student. Wherever possible, institutions are encouraged to use the Tuition and Fee Assistance Program to reduce student education loan debt.

INSTITUTIONAL DISBURSEMENT OF GRANT:

Each participating institution must provide information to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education regarding the student's financial aid award for the current academic year. This information will be used to determine the student's Tuition and Fee assistance. Institutions must disburse funds in compliance with guidelines governing all state financial aid programs.

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT:

All institutions receiving funds under the Massachusetts Foster Child Tuition and Fee Assistance Program for eligible Foster Children must have an active State Financial Aid Participation Agreement on file with the Office of Student Financial Assistance.

AUDIT REQUIREMENTS:

The Commissioner of Higher Education shall require each campus to furnish annually by August 31 a report detailing the number of Foster Children assisted for the previous year and the corresponding amount of tuition waived.

All financial books, records and documents pertaining to this program shall at all times be open to inspection, review and audit by the Commissioner of Higher Education, the State Auditor or their authorized representatives who shall have access to the premises wherever such books, records and documents are located. The institutions shall retain such books, records and documents for seven years. An institution may retain such records for a period of five years if approval is received from the Records Conservation Board in accordance with General Laws, Chapter 30, s. 42