



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

National Guard Tuition & Fee Waiver

Background

In 2005, the Massachusetts Legislature enacted and the Governor signed "An Act Providing Benefits to Service Members, Veterans and their Families."¹ This law provides, among other benefits, tuition and fee waivers at Massachusetts public higher education institutions for active members of the Massachusetts National Guard. In its first full year (FY07), the waiver provided more than 550 National Guard members with free tuition and fees valued at approximately \$1.8 million. Prior to FY07, National Guard members received a tuition-only waiver.

Eligibility for the waiver program is based on meeting these requirements:

- Must be an active member of the Massachusetts National Guard
- Must be accepted or enrolled full- or part-time at a Massachusetts institution of public higher education
- Must have been issued a certificate of eligibility by the Military Division of the Commonwealth
Must maintain satisfactory academic progress

The waiver is valid for up to 130 credit hours per eligible individual.

Policy Details

The National Guard waiver is currently the only waiver program in the Commonwealth that includes *both tuition and fees*; all other programs waive tuition, only. Because fee waivers result in a loss of revenue to the colleges and campuses, and because of the uneven distribution of participation among institutions, the Commonwealth has provided an annual appropriation to reimburse the colleges for the cost of the waiver. In FY07, the

Legislature provided \$4.4 million for the program under the Board of Higher Education (7066-1000). This level of funding for the full tuition and fee waiver program was based on the assumption that twice as many members would participate in the waiver program now that it covers both tuition *and* fees.

In FY08, funding for the program was transferred from the BHE to the Military Division (8700-1150). In addition, the Military Division has taken over full responsibility for the administration and execution of the program and disbursement of funds.

BHE Position

The Board of Higher Education supports the intent of the National Guard waiver in expanding access to public higher education. Consistent with the Financial Aid Task Force Report², the Board of Higher Education advocates for means-testing as an additional criteria for eligibility for all waivers.

Means-testing ensures that limited state resources go to those most in need and provides for equity in access and affordability to all residents.

¹ Chapter 130 of the Acts of 2005

² Final report from the Task Force on Student Financial Aid, accepted by the Board of Higher Education Oct. 2006.