

VETERANS CORNER

Welcome once again to the Veterans Corner! Because at this time there are many veteran dependents enrolling into local colleges for the upcoming fall semester, I would like to remind you about the California College Fee Waiver (CFW) Program, an education benefit available to the spouses and children of U.S. veterans through the California Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Fee Waiver runs through the academic year, beginning with each fall semester. Once certain eligibility criteria are met, dependents can get their tuition and other fees waived when attending any California community college, California State University, or University of California campus.

So, who is eligible and what are the criteria? I will offer you the guidelines here, but please don't hesitate to contact my office to discuss further details. The state offers Plans A through D, but we will describe here the most commonly used Plans: A and B. Please note that the CFW benefit cannot be used to attend private or out-of-state colleges under either plan.

Plan A: You must be the spouse, registered domestic partner (RDP), child, or unmarried surviving spouse of a wartime veteran who is totally disabled due to a service-related illness or injury or who has died from a service-connected cause, or any dependent of a former POW or veteran who was declared MIA.

Under Plan A, there is no income limit, but the child of a veteran must be between 14 and 27 years of age (up to age 30 if the child is also a veteran). There is no age limit for a spouse or RDP. This benefit is not available to students who are also eligible for Chapter 35 VA benefits (which was addressed in the Veterans Corner article published on July 17, 2012. You can find the article on our website at tchhsa.org). Additionally, surviving spouses or RDPs must not have remarried. The veteran's date of death or date of 100% disability rating has to have occurred before the child's 21st birthday.

Ken Cruickshank, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Services Officer for Tulare County. Send your questions to the Veterans Services Office, 205 N. L St., in Tulare, by calling 684-4960 or emailing kcruicks@tularehhsa.org.

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Plan B: You must be the child of a veteran who has a permanent service-related disability or who had a service-related disability at the time of death, or who died from service-related causes.

Under Plan B, there is no age limit, but the child's income plus the value of parental support must not exceed the federal poverty level of \$12,316 (this figure may be adjusted annually). The academic year benefit is based on the previous year's annual income. This benefit can be used in conjunction with Chapter 35 benefits; wartime service is not a requirement; and the benefit is only available to the children of a veteran. To document the child's income, you may use either a copy of the current year's income tax return (either the 1040 or the 540) or a letter of non-filing provided by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS usually starts issuing these letters after June 15 of each year.

Staff at the County Veterans Services Office (CVSO) are available to help you determine whether you are eligible and to help you complete the application form, which is downloadable at www.cacvso.org (just follow the "College Fee Waiver" link). You may also pick up the form at the local CVSO. Once completed, just return the application to us, along with proof of income (if enrolling under Plan B) and proof of your relationship to the veteran (such as a copy of your birth, marriage, or domestic partnership certificate). Once the CVSO receives all the required information, a benefit letter will be mailed to you and to the appropriate school within two weeks.

To receive more information or to see if you qualify, feel free to contact my office at (559) 684-4960. You may also visit the Tulare County Health & Human Services website at tchhsa.org, where you may find an archive of all of my columns.

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