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# **State Financial Aid Manual**

## **Public Safety Officer's Survivor Grant Program**

### **2025-2026**

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**About the Minnesota Office of Higher Education**

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding up to \$235 million in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending accredited institutions in Minnesota. The agency oversees other state grant and scholarship programs, tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 Institution Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

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## Introduction

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This manual is written for the Office of Higher Education (OHE) and participating postsecondary institutions for use in administering the Public Safety Officer's Survivor Grant Program (SOS). It is subject to all subsequent changes in both federal and Minnesota state laws and regulations governing this program. This manual is updated on a regular basis. Institutions are required to read all e-mail and written correspondence from the Office of Higher Education to keep informed of any changes in policy or guidance. Changes announced during the interim have the full force and effect of the State Financial Aid Manual.

## Program Overview

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education administers the education benefit portion of the Public Safety Officer's Survivor Benefits. Up to \$100,000 is available for awards. Dependent children under the age of 23 and the surviving spouse of a public safety officer killed in the line of duty on or after January 1, 1973, are eligible to receive education benefits. The age limit is extended to less than 30 years for a dependent child who has served on active military duty for 181 consecutive days or more and has been honorably discharged or released.

## Program Objective

To provide postsecondary financial assistance to students who are spouses or dependent children of public safety officers killed in the line of duty.

## Definitions

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### Award Year

An award year is the period between July 1 to June 30. It can also be referred to as the state fiscal year.

### Academic Year

An academic year is a period in which a full-time student is expected to complete the equivalent of at least two semesters, two trimesters or three quarters; or at least 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours; or at least 900 clock hours. For credit-hour programs, an academic year must be at least 30 weeks in duration. For a clock-hour program, an academic year must be at least 26 weeks in duration.

## Enrollment Level

The number of credits a student is enrolled in for a term or academic year. For this program, the maximum enrollment level is 15 credits for an undergraduate degree and 6 credits or the equivalent for a graduate program.

## Certificate Program

A program that is offered by an eligible school and is:

- at least 12 quarter/8 semester credits or 300 clock hours; and
- at least eight weeks long

## Tuition and Fee Maximum

Refers to the maximum 9-month annual tuition and mandatory fees established in law for students enrolled in a four-year degree program and a two-year degree program.

## Dependent Child

A “dependent child” under section 299A.41, subdivision 2 means a person who is unmarried and who was either living with or was receiving support contributions from the public safety officer at the time of death, including a child by birth, a stepchild, an adopted child, or a posthumous child, and who is:

- 1) under 18 years of age;
- 2) over 18 years of age and incapable of self-support because of physical or mental disability; or
- 3) over 18 years of age and a student as defined by United States Code, title 5, section 8101.

## Spouse

A “spouse” under section 299A.41, subdivision 5 means a person legally married to the decedent at the time of the decedent’s Death.

## Public Safety Officer

Public safety officer includes:

- 1) a peace officer defined in section 626.84, subdivision 1, paragraph (c) or (d);
- 2) a correction officer employed at a correctional facility and charged with maintaining the safety, security, discipline, and custody of inmates at the facility;
- 3) a corrections staff person working in a public agency and supervising offenders in the community as defined in sections 243.05, subdivision 6; 244.19, subdivision 1; and 401.01, subdivision 2;

- 4) an individual employed on a full-time basis by the state or by a fire department of a governmental subdivision of the state as defined in section 299A.41, subdivision 4;
- 5) a legally enrolled member of a volunteer fire department or member of an independent nonprofit firefighting corporation who is engaged in the hazards of firefighting;
- 6) a good samaritan while complying with the request or direction of a public safety officer to assist the officer;
- 7) a reserve police officer or a reserve deputy sheriff while acting under the supervision and authority of a political subdivision;
- 8) a driver or attendant with a licensed basic or advanced life-support transportation service who is engaged in providing emergency care;
- 9) a first responder who is certified by the director of the Office of Emergency Medical Services to perform basic emergency skills before the arrival of a licensed ambulance service and who is a member of an organized service recognized by a local political subdivision to respond to medical emergencies to provide initial medical care before the arrival of an ambulance; and
- 10) a person, other than a state trooper, employed by the commissioner of public safety and assigned to the State Patrol, whose primary employment duty is either Capitol security or the enforcement of commercial motor vehicle laws and regulations.

## **Killed in the Line of Duty**

In the case of a public safety officer, killed in the line of duty includes the death of a public safety officer caused by accidental means while the public safety officer is acting in the course and scope of duties as a public safety officer. "Killed in the line of duty" also means if a public safety officer dies as the direct and proximate result of a heart attack, stroke, or vascular rupture, that officer shall be presumed to have died as the direct and proximate result of a personal injury sustained in the line of duty as described in section 299A.41, subdivision 3.

"Killed in the line of duty" also means that the officer died due to suicide as described in section 299A.41, subdivision 3.

## **Eligibility**

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### **Postsecondary Institutions**

Minnesota public or private postsecondary institutions that participates in the State Grant program (Minnesota Statutes 136A.101, Subd. 4) are eligible to participate in the Public Safety Officer's Survivor Grant program.

### **Student Eligibility**

The student must:

- Meet one of the following relations to a public safety officer killed in the line of duty on or after January 1, 1973:
  - A dependent child under the age of 23 before the first day of the academic year
  - A dependent child under the age of 30 if served on active military duty for 181 consecutive days or more and has been honorably discharged or released to the reserve or National Guard unit
  - A surviving spouse
- Be enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate degree program or a certificate program at an eligible Minnesota institution
- Obtain a Public Safety Officer's Benefit Fund Certificate issued by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- Have not received benefits for more than 10 full-time semesters or 15 full-time quarters\*, or the equivalent.

*\*A student who fully withdraws from the institution for active military service or due to a major medical illness may be permitted to an additional semester of grant eligibility.*

## Application and Awarding

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### Application Process

The student must:

1. Complete the student section of the Public Safety Officer's Survivor Grant application.
2. Retrieve a copy of the Public Safety Officer's Benefit Fund Certificate from the Commissioner of Public Safety. *(Only needs to be provided once with the initial application. See Appendix A for an example.)*
3. Hand in the application and eligibility certificate to the Financial Aid Office at the institution the student is attending.

The Financial Aid Office must:

1. Complete the institution section of the application for the enrolled term.
2. Submit the required documents to OHE after the add/drop deadline to ensure the student's enrollment and award amount.

The Financial Aid Office will need to submit the institution section of the application to OHE for each enrolled term within the academic year to receive funds.

### ***Deadline Date for Submission of Application***

The application must be received by OHE no later than the last day of classes of the academic year.

## Award Process

The OHE Program Administrator will review each completed application and calculate the award amount for the eligible students. A payment roster will be provided with recipient and award information for the term.

Institutions are responsible for notifying eligible students of their Public Safety Officer's Survivor Grant.

If there are any changes to a recipient's enrollment or financial aid status that may affect their eligibility or the award amount, institutions must notify OHE.

## Award Amount Guidelines

The award amount is the lesser of:

- a) the annual average full-time tuition and mandatory fees charged by the institution, prorated for term length and enrollment level; or
- b) the applicable tuition and fee maximum established in law for the State Grant program, prorated for term length and enrollment level.

The tuition and fee maximums for students in a four-year degree program and a two-year degree program will be posted on the Public Safety Officer's Survivor Grant Program website annually.

An award from the grant program must not affect a recipient's eligibility for a State Grant. Other state financial aid programs, specifically last dollar programs that account for other state aid, will be calculated in the order of enactment from oldest to most recent. *See Appendix B for an overview.*

## Award Calculation

To determine the award amount for a term, the annual tuition and fees must be prorated based on the term length and enrollment level. If the annual tuition and fees exceed the tuition and fee maximum as described in 'Definitions', then the tuition and fees must be capped off at the maximum amount.

For example, if a student is enrolled in 12 credits at an institution on the semester system, the annual tuition and fees will be multiplied by 50% and then by 80% (12 credits divided by 15 credits).

**Formula:**  $[\$17,370 \times .50] \times .80 = \$6,948$

## Renewals

The grant is given for one academic year and is renewable for a maximum of 8 semesters, 12 quarters or the equivalent. The student must reapply for the grant each academic year.

An award will not be renewed if the student is a dependent child who has reached the age limitation as described in the 'Student Eligibility' section.

## Extra Term of Eligibility

A student who fully withdraws from the institution for active military service or due to a major medical illness may be permitted to an additional semester of grant eligibility. The institution should request supporting documentation from the student and verify that the student is eligible. Then email the OHE Program Administrator to make the adjustment.

## Summer Awarding

Recipients may receive an additional award during the summer term if there are funds available. Recipients must continue to meet all eligibility requirements and have not received the grant for an equivalent of 10 full-time semesters or 15 full-time quarters.

Summer awards will count towards the equivalent full-time semester and quarter limitation.

## Disbursement Process

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Disbursements are made directly to the eligible postsecondary institution via Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) within 30 days of the receipt of the application for the academic term but not before July 1 of the academic year.

Disbursements must be based on the recipient's enrollment level as of the date of disbursement or the add/drop date as stated in the institutions' catalog whichever is later. Institutions are liable for all funds that are disbursed to a recipient prior to the start of the enrollment period if the recipient fails to begin the enrollment period.

All other related disbursement guidelines used for the State Grant program apply to the Public Safety Officer's Survivor Grant including determination of disbursement date, acceptable methods of disbursement, student authorization for EFT transactions, student account balance requirements and other applicable guidelines described in the 'Disbursement Process' section of the State Grant chapter in the Financial Aid Manual.

## Institutional Refund Process

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If a recipient fails to enroll, the unused funds must be returned. If there is a reduction of a recipient's enrollment (i.e. drop a course) before or after disbursement of funds, contact the OHE Program Administrator to determine the adjusted award amount.

Refunds must be returned to OHE within 30 days of the receipt of funds at the institution or when the recipient's ineligibility or adjusted award amount was determined whichever is later.

The institution may retain funds for more than 30 days if the school has acquired written documentation from the recipient confirming that the recipient will start the applicable term at a later date. The institution must inform OHE the date on which the funds were disbursed and the corresponding dollar amount.

If a recipient fully withdraws after the disbursement of funds, institutions must refer to the OHE Refund Calculation Worksheet to determine the refund amount to return.

The online Refund Return Form will need to be completed separately for each state financial aid program, but multiple students can be added to the form for the same state aid program.

## State Audit Requirements

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### Records Available for Auditors

State auditors will periodically visit each participating institution to perform an audit. The institution also has the option of hiring an outside auditing firm to conduct its state audits in conjunction with its audits of federal aid programs. (See 'Audits' under the Common Definitions chapter of the Financial Aid Manual for further information.)

Each participating institution must establish a procedure by which an audit can be conducted by going to no more than three administrative offices within the institution. In most cases, these will be the financial aid office, the business office and the registrar's office, but that choice is made by the institution.

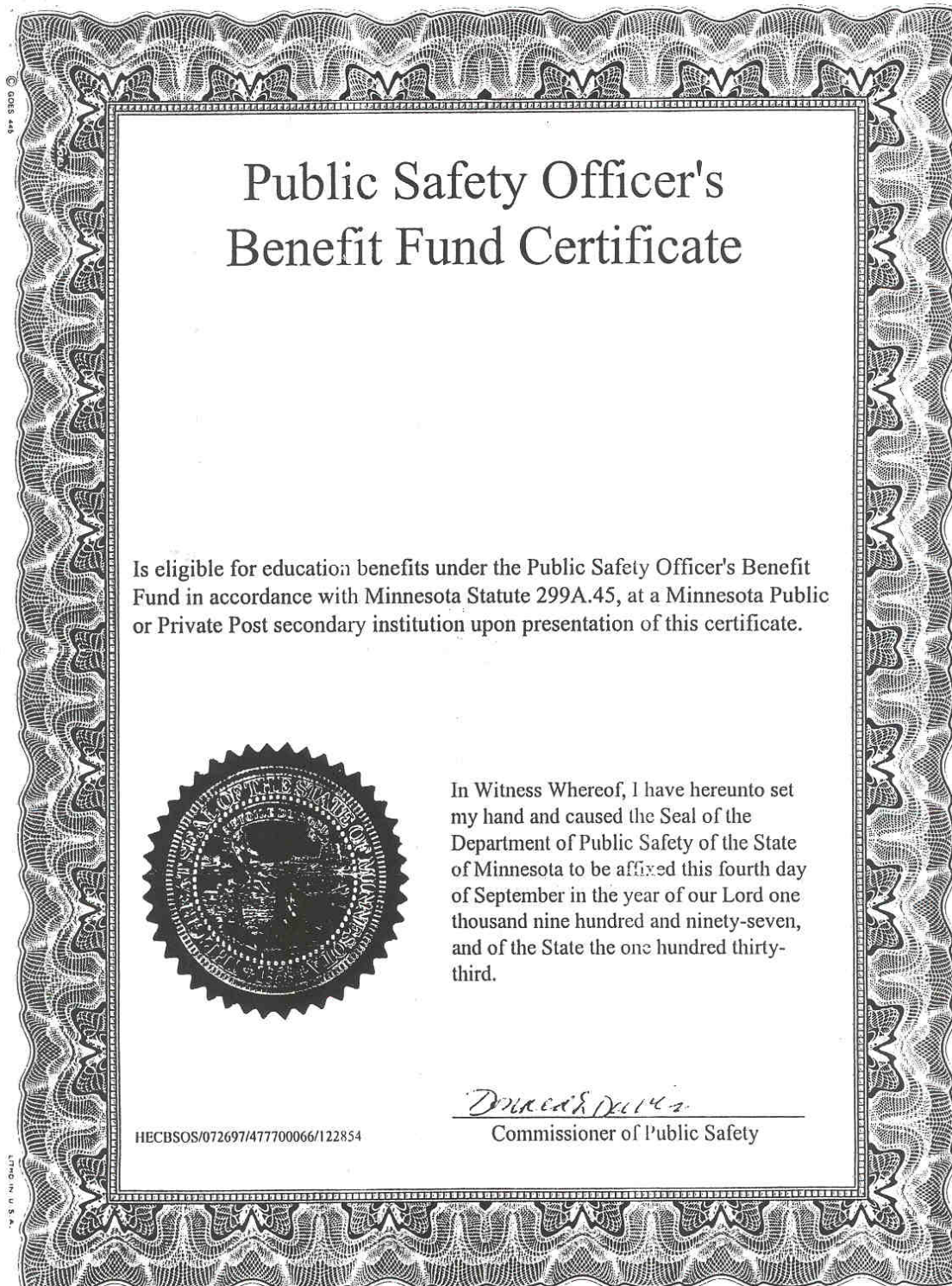
Each institution must maintain and make available to auditors the following:

1. Financial aid files for Public Safety Officer's Survivor Grant recipients;
2. Copy of Public Safety Officer's Benefit Fund Certificate;
3. Copy of completed grant program application;
4. Documentation of enrollment level in eligible program for each recipient;
5. Documentation of the disbursement dates and amounts of each individual award;
6. Documentation of the refund amounts and the date the funds were returned to OHE (i.e., copy of OHE refund return form).

Historical records and documentation must be kept on file for three years after the last day of the fiscal year or until all audit exceptions for the period are resolved.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Public Safety Officer's Benefit Fund Certificate



## Appendix B: Order of Aid Calculations for MN State Aid Programs

Over the past several legislative sessions, the legislature has created multiple state “last dollar” financial aid programs. Last dollar financial aid programs are programs that account for or take into consideration other financial aid when calculate the amount of aid a student is eligible for from the program.

To address the challenge of the existence of multiple state financial aid programs with a last dollar component, the Minnesota Revisor’s Office suggested Order of Aid Calculation language. The suggested language was included in the Higher Education Omnibus Bill, HF4024, Ch.124 that passed in the 2024 legislative session.

What does the Order of Aid Calculation language mean?

The language that passed instructs state financial aid programs to be calculated in the order of their original enactment from oldest to most recent.

### Order of Enactment for OHE State Financial Aid Programs

| Program                                                          | Year Enacted | Does this Program Account for Other State Aid? |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Minnesota Indian Scholarship Program                             | 1959         | Yes (remaining need from Cost of Attendance)   |
| Minnesota State Grant                                            | 1971         | No                                             |
| Public Safety Officer’s Survivor Grant                           | 1973         | No                                             |
| Postsecondary Child Care Grant                                   | 1989         | No                                             |
| Student Teacher Grants in Shortage Areas                         | 2016         | Yes (remaining need from Cost of Attendance)   |
| Grants for Students w/ Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities | 2017         | No                                             |
| Underrepresented Student Teacher Grants                          | 2021 (a)     | Yes (remaining need from Cost of Attendance)   |
| Aspiring Teachers of Color Scholarship                           | 2021 (b)     | Yes (remaining need from Cost of Attendance)   |
| Fostering Independence Higher Education Grants                   | 2021 (c)     | Yes (remaining need from Cost of Attendance)   |
| Get Ready Student Success Scholarship                            | 2023         | No                                             |
| North Star Promise Scholarship                                   | 2023         | Yes (last dollar from tuition and fees)        |

The language further instructs that when a student is:

- eligible for multiple state financial aid programs; and
- two or more of those programs calculate the award amount after accounting for other state aid,
- then the Commissioner of the Office of Higher Education can determine the order of calculating the state aid.