

 <div> PA TURNPIKE COMMISSION POLICY <i>This is a statement of official Pennsylvania Turnpike Policy</i> </div>		NUMBER: 4.01 APPROVAL DATE: 06-05-2012 EFFECTIVE DATE: 06-20-2012 REVISED DATE: 04-04-2023
POLICY SUBJECT: Educational Assistance Program	RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT: Human Resources	

A. PURPOSE:

This policy establishes the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission's (Commission) Educational Assistance Program to provide financial assistance to employees for Post-secondary Education Programs. The Educational Assistance Program provides for Tuition Reimbursement to employees who successfully complete an approved educational course in support of their professional and personal self-development goals. The Educational Assistance Program also provides for Student Loan Debt Reimbursement in accordance with, and during the duration of, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).

B. SCOPE:

This policy letter applies to all full-time, regular Commission employees who have at least 6 months of service.

C. GENERAL POLICY:

Employees may receive up to \$5,250 under the Educational Assistance Program per calendar year. This amount includes any Tuition Reimbursement and Student Loan Debt Reimbursement payments. Employees may not receive Student Loan Debt Reimbursement for expenses they previously received through the Commission's Tuition Reimbursement Program. Although these payments are not subject to federal taxes, they may be subject to state and local taxes. Employees receiving Tuition Reimbursement and Student Loan Debt Reimbursement payments are responsible for making appropriate payroll withholding adjustments, if desired, and for settling any tax liability on year-end tax filing.

Total payments an employee receives under the Educational Assistance Program (regardless of whether they are in the form of Tuition Reimbursement, Student Loan Debt Reimbursement, or both) will cap at \$21,000 per employee for the entirety of their employment.

If any provision of this policy is inconsistent with the terms of a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), the terms of the CBA shall control.

Tuition Reimbursement

The Commission may, at its sole discretion, provide Tuition Reimbursement to eligible employees for approved education courses. Employees are required to schedule courses/programs during non-work hours. Coursework may be completed through traditional classes or through non-traditional programs such as distance-learning programs. Ongoing participation in the Tuition Reimbursement program is contingent on an employee's continued proficient job performance. To receive Tuition Reimbursement, the following conditions apply:

- a. The employee must obtain approval to attend the educational course from their immediate supervisor, Department Head (DH) and Human Resources (HR) prior to starting the course/program.
- b. The course must not be available through In-service Training programs at the Commission.
- c. The employee can be reimbursed at 100% for tuition, registration, course related fees, and books that were required for the course(s) that began after the Revised Date of this policy. Courses prior to the effective date of this policy will fall under the prior Tuition Reimbursement Policy.
- d. Employees enrolled in a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Training Program will be reimbursed for 100% of tuition for the class, initial driving testing, drug testing, physical examination, and license. Costs associated with license and physical examination renewals are not eligible for reimbursement under this program.
- e. Reimbursable costs shall not include tools and supplies that may aid the employee with the course (e.g., computer hardware, software, calculators, instructional tapes), parking fees, transportation, or other optional expenses.
- f. The course must be administered by a licensed and accredited educational institution.
- g. The course must contribute to the employee's Professional Development, Continuing Education or Higher Education learning.
- h. The employee must Successfully Complete the course to be eligible for reimbursement.
- i. An employee will not be eligible for reimbursement if they withdraw from an approved course or if the approved course is canceled. The employee is required to immediately notify their DH and HR if they withdraw from an approved course, they do not get an acceptable passing grade on a course, or if the course is canceled.

Student Loan Debt

The Commission may, at its sole discretion, allow for Student Loan Debt to be included under the Educational Assistance Program for the duration of the CARES Act. Reimbursement can be made for Student Loan Debt that has already been paid by the employee for Post-secondary Education Programs. The following conditions shall apply to Student Loan Debt paid during the eligible dates of the CARES Act:

- a. The employee must provide documentation to support their request for reimbursement for a qualified educational program.
- b. The reimbursement must be for a Qualified Education Loan that is in the employee's name. It will not cover loans such as Parent Plus loans that were obtained for the employee.

- c. Employees are only eligible for their own student loan debt relief. They cannot be reimbursed for dependent or spousal education costs.
- d. Employees must provide documentation to support the payments they have made to their lender. Employees can be reimbursed for interest and principal payments that were already paid during the eligible dates of the CARES Act.
- e. The employee's loan payments must have been made to the student loan servicer between the eligible dates of the CARES Act.
- f. Employees can submit for reimbursement for payments made in previous calendar years (dating back to the implementation of the CARES Act on March 27, 2020) but cannot receive more than \$5,250 per calendar year in payments for the Student Loan Debt Reimbursement and/or Tuition Reimbursement programs combined.
- g. Employees who are enrolled in Public Service Loan Forgiveness are eligible to receive Student Loan Debt Reimbursement under this program until they meet their forgiveness requirements.

D. DEFINITIONS:

CARES Act – The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act was passed by Congress on March 27th, 2020, and amended by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. It allows for Federal tax-free employer reimbursement of student loan debt.

Continuing Education – Formal learning activities that are not necessarily focused on a college degree outcome but could enable an employee to further develop their skills and knowledge in specific areas.

Department Head – The Chief or Director whose position is graded at the highest level over an entire department.

Educational Assistance Program – An employee benefit in which an employer pays towards an employee's educational expenses.

Full-time, Regular Employee – An employee that has successfully completed their probationary/introductory period and who has been assigned to a full-time position.

Higher Education – Courses taken at colleges, universities, vocational, and/or trade schools.

In-Service Training – Courses, training sessions, conferences, seminars, workshops, and distance learning programs that are sponsored by the Commission.

Post-secondary Education Programs – includes universities and colleges, as well as trade and vocational schools.

Professional Development – Continuing Education and career training after a person has entered the workforce to help them develop new skills and advance their career.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) – A federal loan forgiveness program established as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007. Under PSLF, eligible borrowers who work

full-time for nonprofit organizations or federal, state, local or tribal governments can get loan forgiveness after making 120 qualifying monthly payments.

Qualified Education Loan – A loan taken out solely to pay qualified Higher Education expenses for yourself as defined by the IRS standards. Under Section 127 of the CARES Act private student loans are eligible when they are obtained through a private student loan servicer. Loans from family members such as Parent Plus loans are not included in the definition of Qualified Education Loan.

Successfully Complete – Receiving an acceptable grade in a course, as follows:

- a “C” letter grade or higher,
- a 2.00 grade point average or higher on a 4.00 system,
- a “Pass” grade on a “Pass/Fail” grading system, or
- a “B” letter grade or higher for graduate-level courses or equivalent

Student Loan Debt Reimbursement – Reimbursement of student debt federal tax-free for Post-secondary Education Programs where payments have already been made to the lender between March 27, 2020, and December 31, 2025, or any extension modification made through the CARES Act.

Tuition Reimbursement – Reimbursement of a portion, or all of the employee's tuition costs by the Commission.

E. PROCEDURES:

Tuition Reimbursement

a. Approval

1. Employees must complete a [Tuition Reimbursement Request](#) form prior to attending the course. Forms can be found in Service Now or paper forms may be printed off the Employee Portal. Employees must attach the required supporting documentation.
2. The supervisor shall review the request and make a recommendation to the DH or their designee for approval/disapproval. The DH shall approve or disapprove the recommendation and forward the request to HR.
3. HR will approve or deny the request and notify the DH, supervisor, and the employee of the decision.

b. Reimbursement

1. Once a class is complete, the employee must provide verification to HR within 90 days of completion that the course meets the definition of Successfully Complete. Reimbursement will not be made for requests received beyond the 90-day time limit.

2. Acceptable forms of verification include:
 - a. The grade report or signed verification from the institution,
 - b. A valid license or certificate, or
 - c. The official transcript from the institution showing the grade.

Student Loan Debt Reimbursement

Approval

Employees must complete a "Student Loan Debt Reimbursement Request" form to HR.

- a. Forms can be found in Service Now or paper forms are available on the Employee Portal.
- b. Employees must attach the required supporting documentation.

Reimbursement

The employee must provide documentation to support the payments they have made to the lender.

- a. Proof of the student loan, must include:
 1. Employee Name (i.e., that the loan was obtained for the employee and not for dependent or spousal education costs).
 2. Type of Loan
 3. Loan Number
- b. Receipts for payment made to the student loan servicer, must include:
 1. Date of payment
 2. Amount paid
- c. Employees can submit requests for reimbursement throughout the year; however, payments may be held for batch processing as determined appropriate by HR.
- d. Requests for Student Loan Debt Reimbursement must be submitted by November 30 of each year to receive reimbursement for that calendar year.

When the necessary documentation has been received and approved, and HR processes the request for payment, Payroll will reimburse the employee via direct deposit included in the employee's paycheck.

The employee must remain employed by the Commission for a period of one year following the date of reimbursement. Should the employee leave within that year, they must reimburse the Commission for all monies received under the Educational Assistance Program. The Commission will use its discretion to determine the method to recoup the monies due if an employee leaves employment.

The Commission reserves the right to modify the Educational Assistance Program at any time, including, but not limited to, terminating the program, lowering the level of reimbursement for participants, or changing the requirements for eligibility based on budgetary constraints.

This Policy Letter supersedes all previous Policy Letters on this subject.