

## **BSW/BSSW Tuition Assistance Program: Frequently Asked Questions**

The following information is intended to provide an overview of the DCS BSW/BSSW Tuition Assistance Program procedures. Guidelines and policies are subject to change. Participants should consider the terms and conditions in their signed Program Agreement as authoritative.

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### **Who is eligible to participate?**

The DCS BSW/BSSW Tuition Assistance Program is intended for undergraduate students in their final 2 years of study who have chosen to enter the social work profession. Specifically, a candidate should desire to work directly with vulnerable children and families as a front-line case manager for the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) upon graduation. For additional information, please see "Eligibility" on the DCS Tuition Assistance Program Home Page.

### **Is selection into the program competitive?**

DCS will evaluate the pool of applications and make selection decisions based on factors such as the availability of funds, regional employment needs, and candidate strengths as relayed in the application (see "Applying for the DCS Tuition Assistance Program" under "Forms and Information" on the DCS Tuition Assistance Program Home Page).

### **How do I apply to the DCS BSW/BSSW Tuition Assistance Program?**

The information you will need to apply to the program is located on the Applying for the DCS BSW/BSSW Tuition Assistance Program link under "Forms and Information" on the Home Page. Please take care to fully complete and submit by the deadlines listed all application materials to avoid disqualification or payment delays. Please submit all application materials in one package along with a tracking number.

### **What are my responsibilities as a program participant?**

There are both academic and administrative responsibilities for program participants. General responsibilities are outlined as a part of the "Eligibility Requirements" and "Program Guidelines" on the DCS Tuition Assistance Program Home Page. For a detailed view of student responsibilities, please read the Program Agreement.

### **Can I take summer classes?**

Yes, participants can receive tuition assistance up to 12.0 credit hours and a stipend if participating during the summer term. Please note that reception of aid for summer counts toward one of the student's four (4) semesters of aid that can be received for obtaining a BSW through this program. Like any other semester, students must participate full-time (12.0 credit hours).

### **Whom do I contact with questions or for additional information?**

Please pose all inquiries about requirements, process, and procedure about the program to:

Department of Children's Services  
Tuition Assistance Program  
c/o Brittany Buchanan – Program Specialist  
UBS Tower  
315 Deaderick Street, 7th Floor  
Nashville, TN 37243  
OR scan and email to:  
[IV-E\\_Tuition.EI-DCS@tn.gov](mailto:IV-E_Tuition.EI-DCS@tn.gov)

### **What does the program pay for?**

The program pays for tuition/approved fees for a full-time BSW student. For students attending public universities, tuition/approved fees are paid based on enrollment as noted on their university's annually published fee schedule. For students attending private universities, tuition/approved fees are paid up to a "tuition cap," which is based on the highest rate charged by public in-state universities. Students attending private universities are personally responsible for paying any tuition and/or fees that exceed this cap.

### **Will this affect my financial aid from other sources?**

The tuition/related fee/stipend payments issued to you through this program will form a part of the student's overall financial aid package. The university financial aid office will consider all sources of funding available to the student and will not allow combined sources to exceed the cost of your attendance. This might mean that the level of funding issued through this program or from other sources could be adjusted. It is recommended that consultation with the university's financial aid office for specific information regarding personal circumstances is recommended.

### **What is the payment process?**

Program participants receive two types of payment: (1) tuition/approved fee payments and (2) stipend payments.

*Tuition/approved fees:* Each semester, a letter is sent to participants' universities requesting that their tuition/approved fees be billed to DCS rather than to the student. This request is issued upon receipt of the program participant's complete class schedule for the term and current documentation (e.g. grades from previous semesters), and it serves as confirmation of attendance and secures participants' class schedule. Later, approximately mid-way through the semester (university time frames vary), universities will bill DCS for tuition/related fees (note: until the university bills DCS for your tuition/related fees and those are paid, you might see a balance on your account). To ensure timely payment, please take care to register early and submit all paperwork as requested.

*Stipend payments:* After all application materials, schedules and grades have been received, DCS will authorize a stipend payment which will be forwarded to the student's university account. Usually, stipend payments are posted to the student's account within 4 weeks of authorization. To ensure timely payment, please take care to register early and submit all paperwork as requested.

### **How are payments made?**

All payments (tuition and stipends) are made directly to the student's university and are credited to his or her university account. For specific details on where to retrieve stipend payments, students should contact their university's Bursar/business office.

### **When can I expect payment?**

If a student registers by the deadlines listed under "Important Dates" on the DCS BSW Tuition Assistance Program Home Page and all documentation (e.g., class schedule and grades) has been received by DCS by specified timelines, the stipend payment should be authorized by the first day of class. Students should receive payments within their student account within 4 weeks of authorization. Failure to register and submit paperwork by the deadlines posted could result in delayed payments. Tuition/related fee payments are not made until later in the semester when the university bills them to DCS.

### **What if I do not receive payment at the expected time?**

Students should contact the DCS Tuition Assistance Programs Specialist with questions related to payment after having contacted their university Bursar's office to identify the issue. Please note: Federal law prohibits the release of specific account information to parties other than the student.

### **How much is the stipend payment and what is it used for?**

Program participants receive a stipend payment for each semester that they receive aid. The amount of the stipend is subject to change from year to year. Please contact the DCS Tuition Assistance Programs Specialist for the current amount. This stipend payment is intended to provide financial support for non-tuition/related fee expenses associated with participation in the program—e.g., living expenses, travel, and textbooks (there is not a separate payment associated with any of these expenses).

### **Why do I see an account balance after having submitted all required paperwork?**

Students might see a balance on their account until their tuition is paid to the university by DCS. Tuition payments are not actually paid until later in the semester when the university bills DCS. Until the university receives the check from DCS, a balance might be noted on the account (see "What is the payment process")

**What is the employment obligation to DCS upon completion of my degree?**

Upon graduation, students will owe the Department six (6) months of employment for every semester of aid received with a minimum of 18 months and up to 24 months.

**How do I apply for employment with DCS?**

Please consult the "Graduates Applying to DCS for Employment " presentation on the DCS Tuition Assistance Program Home Page for a guided tour through the application process. Students should contact the DCS Tuition Assistance Programs Specialist as soon as possible with questions or concerns.

**How quickly will I be hired by DCS after graduation?**

Graduates can expect to be hired by the Department within 90 days of graduation.

**What employment benefits do program participants receive?**

Graduates of the DCS BSW Tuition Assistance or Certification Programs are hired by DCS as a Case Manager 1; they are paid, however, at the Case Manager 2 level, which is a difference of approximately \$3000 annually.

**Where will I work?**

DCS will make every effort to allow graduating students to work in the region/site of their choice. There is no guarantee, however, that program participants will be placed according to their preference; graduates might have to relocate to another region in TN, even if that is not their choice. The needs of DCS will determine the location of assignment.