

# Missouri Returning Heroes Act

The Missouri Returning Heroes Act, established August 28, 2008, as amended effective August 28, 2019, provides reduced tuition for certain combat veterans attending public institutions of higher education.

## Am I eligible?

To be eligible for assistance you must meet the following requirements:

- Is a veteran who served in armed combat and can certify through military service documentation that reflects service in a combat theater, receipt of combat service medals, or receipt of imminent danger or hostile fire pay or tax benefits.

To meet this requirement you must have served in a combat zone as designated by the U.S. Department of Defense and as documented on field 13 of your **DD214**.

If you were a member of the Reserves or National Guard you are considered to be a veteran who served in the military as long as you served in armed combat in a full-time capacity under a call to active service authorized by the President of the United States or the Secretary of Defense for a period of more than 30 consecutive days.

Institutions will look at the following indicators to determine if you meet this requirement:

- Receipt of a combat service medal:
    - Bronze Star
    - Combat Action Badge
    - Combat Action Medal
    - Combat Infantry Badge (Army)
    - Combat Ribbon (Marine)
    - Congressional Medal of Honor
    - Global War on Terror ("GWOT") Service Medal
    - Global War on Terror ("GWOT") Badge
    - Purple Heart
    - Any other Action Badge, Combat Medal, or Expeditionary Medal or Ribbon offered within a geographic area that enables the veteran to receive a combat pay tax exclusion exemption, hazardous duty pay, imminent danger pay, or hostile fire pay
  - Any military service in a combat zone. **Combat Zones recognized by the Internal Revenue Service can be found on the IRS website.** Please note this list may not be comprehensive. Your institution may have to contact the Missouri Veterans Commission to determine if your service was in a combat zone.
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- Is a veteran who is eligible to register to vote in Missouri, or who is eligible to vote in Missouri, or who is a current Missouri resident.
  - Discharged from military service under honorable conditions as documented in fields 24 and 28 on your DD214. Any type of discharge other than "bad conduct," "less than honorable," "undesirable," or "dishonorable" is considered to be a discharge under honorable conditions.

- Attend a **public institution of higher education**.
- Achieve and maintain a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of at least 2.5, or its equivalent. Your institution will check your cumulative GPA on the same timetable it uses to calculate state grant and scholarship recipients' cumulative GPAs. Institutions typically check cumulative GPAs either at the end of each semester (2 checks per year), or at the end of each academic year (1 check per year).

You do not have to have a 2.5 CGPA the first time you receive the tuition reduction, even if you have previously attended an institution of higher education. However, you must achieve a 2.5 CGPA at the end of the first and all subsequent periods when the institution checks cumulative GPA in order to continue to receive the reduction.

- Enroll in a program leading to a certificate, or an associate, bachelor's, or graduate degree, including master and doctorate degrees. If you are pursuing a bachelor's degree and an advanced degree at the same time, the tuition reduction will apply to the total cost of the coursework. Your institution may consult with MDHE if this presents any unforeseen complications.
- Professional degrees are not eligible under the Act. Professional degrees, as defined by the Act, may include but are not limited to law, medicine, or veterinary degrees. You may consult the **First-Professional Degrees** identified by the U.S. Department of Education for a more expansive list or contact your institution.

## How much can I receive?

The Returning Heroes Act limits the tuition rate charged to qualifying veterans to \$50 per credit hour for a program leading to a certificate, or an associate or baccalaureate degree. The Act also limits the tuition rate charged to qualifying veterans to 30 percent of the cost of tuition and fees for a program leading to a graduate degree, including master and doctorate degrees. If you are attending an institution that measures coursework in clock hours rather than credit hours, your institution will apply a credit hour to clock hour conversion formula to determine the amount of the tuition limitation.

The tuition reduction is applied before or after federal and state student aid has been applied to the tuition amount, at the veteran's discretion.

If your institution charges fees by the credit hour and does not have any charges specifically designated as tuition, MDHE recommends the institution apply the limitation to the fee. You are not required to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or otherwise apply for federal or state student aid, such as the federal GI Bill benefits or the state Access Missouri grant.

## How long can I receive the reduced tuition?

The tuition limitation for undergraduate degrees expires 10 years from the date of your last discharge from service. For graduate degrees, the tuition limitation expires 20 years from the date of your last discharge from service. You may receive the reduced tuition through the end of the tenth and twentieth year, respectively.

Following are answers to frequently asked questions:

**Q1: What is a DD214 form?**

A1: A DD214 form is a certificate of release or discharge from active duty. An **annotated sample of the DD214** is available to help institutions determine student eligibility.

**Q2: What will the mechanism be for reporting the amount of tuition waived to the CBHE?**

A2: Institutions may submit this information in a letter that accompanies their budget requests. The Missouri Returning Heroes Act provides that institutions may submit information about the amount of tuition waived during the previous fiscal year when they request funding for the following year.

An illustration of the timeline for this is: During July/August 2019 institutions would provide the CBHE with information about the amount of tuition waived during FY18, which would include the 2018-2019 academic year. This information would be provided in connection with the institution's FY21 budget request.

**Q3: How does the Act affect clock hour programs?**

A3: The statute does not specifically exempt programs from this requirement based on the progress measurement system used by the school. Consequently the limit must apply to these programs as well. For programs measured in clock hours rather than credit hours, the institution shall use the conversion formula of 15 classroom hours equals 1 credit hour and apply the tuition limit in an equivalent fashion.

**Q4: What is the institution's role in informing combat veterans of their options under the Missouri Returning Heroes Act?**

A4: The statute specifies that public institutions of higher education shall provide each combat veteran with written notice of their options under the Act and maintain a copy signed by the veteran in their official file.

**Q5: Where should an institution direct additional questions?**

A5: Questions relating to the status of an individual student and their satisfaction of eligibility criteria should be directed to the Missouri Veteran's Commission. While the Veterans' Commission cannot make eligibility determinations, they can provide information about available documentation and interpretation of the information relating to a veteran's military service.

For information about implementation of the requirements, please contact MDHEWD at (800) 473-6757, option 4.