

FEDERAL BENEFITS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS



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Badge of Honor Memorial Foundation

There is a benefit available to police officers, firefighters and other first responders through the US Department of Justice that most people are not even aware of. The benefits discussed here are covered under the Public Safety Officers Benefit Act, which was enacted by Congress in 1976

The purpose of this act is threefold:

- To assist in the recruitment and retention of qualified law enforcement officers, firefighters and first responders in America
- To establish the value communities place on the contributions of those willing to serve their communities in potentially dangerous circumstances
- To offer peace of mind to men and women seeking careers in public safety

DEATH AND DISABILITY BENEFITS

Under this law, federal benefits are paid to the eligible survivors of public safety officers whose death was the direct and proximate result of an injury sustained in the line of duty. A disability benefit may be granted to a public safety officer who has become permanently and totally disabled as the direct result of a catastrophic injury sustained in the line of duty. A public safety officer is a person serving a public agency in an official capacity, with or without compensation, as a law enforcement officer, firefighter or member of a public rescue squad or ambulance crew. Law enforcement officers include but are not limited to police, corrections, probation, parole and judicial officers. Volunteer firefighters, members of volunteer rescue squads and ambulance crews may be covered if they are officially recognized or designated members of legally organized volunteer fire, rescue or ambulance departments.

Under this law, injury is defined as: "... a traumatic physical wound (or physical condition of the body) caused by external force (bullets, explosives, sharp instruments, blunt objects, physical blows); chemicals; electricity; climatic conditions; infectious disease; radiation; virus; or bacteria; but does not include any occupational disease or any condition of the body caused or occasioned by stress or strain." Line of duty is defined as: "an injury is sustained in the line of duty if ...sustained in the course of performance of line of duty activity or action; or authorized commuting; or convincing evidence demonstrates that such injury resulted from the injured party's status as a public safety officer.

This benefit is adjusted each federal fiscal year to reflect the percentage of change in the Consumer Price Index. For each death and disability claim, the award amount is determined by the actual date of the officer's death or disability. As of October 1, 2008 the benefit is \$315,764.00.

HOMETOWN HEROES SURVIVORS BENEFITS ACT

This act applies for deaths occurring **on or after December 15, 2003**

If a public safety officer dies as a direct and proximate result of a heart attack or stroke, that officer shall be presumed to have died as the direct and proximate result of a personal injury sustained in the line of duty if the officer, while on duty, engaged in a situation involving non-routine stressful or strenuous physical activity; that officer died as a result of a heart attack or stroke suffered while engaging or participating in such activity as described above while still on duty, or not later than 24 hours after so engaging or participating in such an activity; and such presumption is not overcome by competent medical evidence to the contrary. Non-routine stressful or strenuous physical activities exclude actions of a clerical, administrative, or non-manual nature.

PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE (PSOEA) PROGRAM

This program provides assistance for higher education for the spouse and children of public safety officers who have been killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty.

The purpose of this program is:

- To enhance the appeal of service in public service agencies.
- To extend the benefits of higher education to qualified and deserving people who, by virtue of the death or total disability of an eligible officer, may not otherwise be able to afford it.
- To allow family members of eligible officers to attain the vocational and educational status that they would have attained had the parent or spouse had not been killed or disabled in the line of duty.

The educational assistance may be used to defray relevant expenses, including tuition and fees, room and board, books, supplies and other education related costs. As of October 1, 2008, the maximum award for a full time student is \$915.00 per month of class attendance for a maximum of 45 months. This amount is also raised each federal fiscal year. Awards are proportionately less for part-time students. Law must reduce all awards reduced by the amount of other governmental assistance that a student is eligible to receive.

The spouse of a public safety officer is eligible to receive PSOEA funds for educational expenses at any time during his or her lifetime. However, a child of the deceased or disabled officer is only eligible to receive PSOEA funds for educational expenses that occur prior to his or her 27th birthday. Also, no spouse or child is eligible to receive PSOEA funds for a period greater than 45 months of full time education or a proportionate period of a part time program. The criteria also require that the student maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.0 each semester.

FILING DATES

In general, the following deadlines apply for applying for PSOB:

Death Claims: Three years after the public safety officer's death; or one year after the receipt or denial of any benefits

Disability Claims: Three years after the injury date; or one year after the receipt or denial of any benefits

AND FINALLY

This is a very important and valuable benefit made available to public safety officers through the Department of Justice – Bureau of Justice Assistance. Naturally this was a brief overview of the many provisions of The Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program. For a more complete look at this entire program, we encourage you go to on line to: psob.gov.

You may contact PSOB either on line or at:

Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program
Bureau of Justice Assistance
US Department of Justice
810 Seventh Street NW
Washington, DC 20531
Toll Free: 888-744-6513
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