

Memorandum

CD26-07

ISSUED DATE: February 2, 2026

TO: Children's Division Contracted Staff

FROM: Sara Smith, Children's Division Director

SUBJECT: **PART-TIME UNDERGRADUATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, CHANGES TO PROGRAM GUIDELINES AND APPLICANT EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

To support as many employees as possible, the Children's Division has made exciting changes to the guidelines of the Undergraduate Tuition Assistance Program starting the Spring 2026 semester. Applications are currently open and will remain open until further notice. This is an incredible opportunity for individuals interested in furthering their education, field skills, and in pursuing a career with the Children's Division.

The part-time Undergraduate Tuition Assistance Program is funded under Governor Kehoe's approved FY2026 budget.

Program Highlights:

- **Assistance is offered to full-time internal applicants and paid interns.** We are accepting applications from those who are needing one to four years of education. No previous undergraduate course work is required. Internal full-time applicants that obtained an associate's degree and/or hold 60 hours of college credit that are accepted by their chosen and applicable university and degree of study will be given preference. **All employees (full-time and interns) must maintain their employment with the Children's Division through graduation, or they will be placed on repayment status.**
- Applications will be accepted from full-time employees and paid interns that are applying to/pending acceptance to an approved University. Final determination of applications cannot be provided until the applicant provides all required documentation including their acceptance to an approved university. Assistance is based on available funding and cannot be guaranteed.
- **Employee must attend an approved, accredited University within the state of Missouri.** Employee must declare a major and that major must be within the approved fields of study (social work, justice systems, psychology, sociology, human services, child advocacy studies). Employee must work with the Department and the University to finalize the approval.
 - If the Employee changes their major, they MUST obtain approval from the Title IV-E Liaison and their major MUST be an approved field of study. If it is not, the Employee will be placed in repayment status.
 - Please contact Christine Steele (Title IV-E Liaison) with questions regarding potentially approved programs. There are Universities that cater to non-traditional students including a new BSW program through University of Missouri, Columbia that is accepting qualified, non-traditional students that hold an associate's degree.
- Allocations for tuition assistance are based upon available funding.
- Not all applicants that apply will be chosen to receive tuition assistance.
- Applicants meeting eligibility criteria for interview will complete a formal interview.
- Employees shall be employed full-time in a Qualified Field Position with the Department's Children's Division for a period of one year after graduation or disenrollment from college for each academic year that the Children's Division sponsors Employee's education. An academic year shall be defined as Fall

semester of year 1 through the end of Summer semester of year 2. For example, from Fall semester of 2025 through the end of Summer semester of 2026 is one academic year. For employment repayment purposes, attendance of one, two, or three semesters of the academic year requires one full year of employment service. The Department will direct bill the Employee's tuition, course related fees, books, and other course related expenses as approved by the Department up to \$4,400 per semester to cover six to nine credit hours of enrollment per semester directly to the University.

- The University and the Department MUST have an agreement for payment of services prior to final negotiation of the Employee's tuition assistance contract with the Department.
- Employees need to be enrolled in at least six credit hours per semester. The Department will reimburse up to nine credit hours per semester. Fees and books for courses taken beyond nine credit hours are the responsibility of the Employee to pay.
- All lodging, travel, meals, and other expenses associated with the Employee's course of study through their approved accredited university program are the sole responsibility of the Employee and shall NOT be reimbursed by the Department.
- All courses beyond the required for the degree, enrolled during unapproved terms, or any courses failed that need to be re-taken will not be reimbursed by the Department.
- The Employee understands that they MUST maintain a GPA of 3.0 or above each semester.
 - Employee will negotiate consents for release of information to the Department so that the Department may review grades and account information to make the appropriate payments.
 - Employee will submit their final grades each semester to the Title IV-E Liaison.
- All Employees who contract with the Department will be required to be employed full-time with the Children's Division after graduation (also known as the service or repayment portion of the contract) in case management/field positions/approved field supervisory positions within the Children's Division only. (Examples: Associate/Social Services Specialist I, II, III, IV; Supervisor; Specialist; Circuit Manager).
- Employees will be granted up to **SIX MONTHS** after graduation to be hired in an approved position within the Division. If qualifying employment is not obtained within that time, the Department will request repayment of expenses.
 - Employees will be required to apply for qualifying field positions per current hiring policies.
 - **The Division cannot guarantee a specific county for employment. The Employee, in submitting their application, fully understands that they may need to re-locate to meet the requirements of their contract.**
- The Department will provide **full-time employees** three hours per week partial reduction of work activity to be used for travel to the University, attendance in classes, study time and/or other activity associated with the coursework. This is subject to conditions based on essential performance responsibilities.
- **Selected full-time Employees will remain employed full-time while attending classes or they will be placed in repayment status.**
- **Selected paid interns are expected to maintain employment with the Children's Division while attending classes or they will be placed in repayment status.**

Application Process:

1. Complete the [Undergraduate Tuition Assistance Application](#) including the following:
 - Current resume
 - Three letters of reference including at least one within the employee's current chain of command.
 - Signed release of Information for the Department of Social Services and University to verify acceptance.
2. Applications will be accepted until funding has been utilized.
3. Upon acceptance of admission by the University and recommendations requested levels of supervision, the Children's Division Central Office representatives will conduct interviews.
4. Upon completion of the interview, the interview team will make recommendations for final approval to the Children's Division Director, and applicants will be notified of their status.

5. Staff accepted into the program will be required to sign an agreement/contract with the Department which outlines the benefits and conditions.

6. Staff will be expected to maintain employment with the Children's Division post-graduation, or will be expected to pay the calculated, prorated cost of their education, in full, at the time of departure.

For more information, please contact Christine Steele: Christine.E.Steele@dss.mo.gov

NECESSARY ACTION:

Review this memorandum with all Children's Division staff.

CD CONTACT:

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