

Missouri House of Representatives

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 23, 2024

CONTACT: State Rep. Brad Christ
Brad.Christ@House.Mo.Gov

Free College Tuition for First Responders and their Dependents Proposed by State Rep. Brad Christ

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Missouri’s first responders put their lives at risk on a regular basis to protect and serve others, and State Representative Brad Christ wants to honor their dedication with free tuition to the state’s public colleges and universities, when they pursue an associate degree or baccalaureate degree related to a career as a first responder.

The First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act would, if enacted, provide free college tuition to the state’s law enforcement officers, firefighters, paramedics, and other first responders, for continuing education toward those degrees. It would also provide for free tuition for their legal dependents.

Rep. Christ filed that legislation as House Bill 496.

“It has been my honor to know many of the dedicated men and women who, every day, put on one of those uniforms and put themselves between harm and the rest of us. I know many of them want to continue their career, and this legislation will help them get the education required to do so. It also takes some of the pressure off of them to provide a good education for their dependents, and is a gesture toward letting those dependents know we appreciate the sacrifice they make, being in the family of a first responder.”

The First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act is also a step toward responding to what some say is a national shortage of first responders. Nebraska enacted it in 2023 to address this crisis in its borders.

Rep. Christ said Offering free tuition to responders and their dependents could make it easier for someone considering such a career to pursue it.

“The fact is, many Missouri communities have too few police officers, too few paramedics, too few firefighters, and we need people to perform these life-saving roles. Offering them free tuition is the least we can do to thank them for taking on the risks that come with these vital jobs.”

Just as important as the recruitment aspect of the act is retention. When Nebraska enacted its law, supporters said they hoped to “lure” law enforcement officers there from other states. For this and other reasons, Rep. Christ said it is important that Missouri offer this and other incentives.

“We have some of the best and most dedicated law enforcement officers and other first responders in the nation. We need to reward their work and sacrifice, especially if we want to keep them here, and since Missouri is already a great place to live, if this encourages some from other states to come here, that won’t be a bad thing.”

The Act would allow free tuition to a first responder or dependent for five years, beginning when they first apply for and receive a tuition waiver, under the Act. An applicant must meet all admission requirements of the public institution, and the first responder must verify that they are trained and authorized to render emergency medical treatment or assistance. The first responder or dependent would also be required to live in the state of Missouri for five years following the use of the waiver.

If a Missouri first responder dies in the line of duty, their dependent would still be eligible to receive the tuition waiver.

The legislation will be considered when the General Assembly begins its new session, January 8.

Representative Brad Christ, a Republican, represents part of St. Louis County (District 96) in the Missouri House of Representatives. He was elected to his first two-year term in November 2022. For more information, please contact Rep. Christ by email at Brad.Christ@House.Mo.Gov.

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