**Section 303.390 Tuition Reimbursement**

a) Tuition reimbursement is intended to serve as a management tool for the development of employees and for the attainment of agency goals. It should be administered as a mechanism through which mutual advantages are gained by both the employee and the State. Tuition reimbursement is not an unconditional or unilateral employee right or benefit.

b) Each agency is responsible for providing budgetary funding for its tuition reimbursement program. The policy administered pursuant to these rules is not intended to alter, replace or diminish the content or use of Federal Grant in Aid, agency sponsored stipend or educational leave of absence programs. In administering this policy, other programs should be distinguished from tuition reimbursement programs and treated separately.

c) Policy Guidelines.

 The following tuition reimbursement guidelines have been developed so as to provide maximum flexibility and a framework within which a decentralized, but uniform, policy can be administered. These guidelines do not preclude agencies from imposing additional requirements or procedures with regard to tuition reimbursement in response to unique training requirements or budgetary restrictions.

1) Eligibility: Any full time employee is eligible for reimbursement consideration. Employees hired on a temporary or emergency basis are not eligible for consideration.

2) Tuition and Fees: Reimbursement will apply only toward tuition and lab fees. Additional costs such as for books, matriculation, activity and health fees will not be reimbursable expenses.

3) Reimbursement: Reimbursement is not to exceed 100% of tuition and lab costs at public institutions, and 80% at private institutions. Agencies may establish an annual dollar cap per employee, depending upon funds available for the program.

4) Satisfactory Course Completion: Reimbursement for an approved course is contingent upon the employee submitting evidence of satisfactory completion (e.g., at least a grade of "C") together with receipts documenting the amount of tuition moneys paid. Reimbursement will be accomplished by means of a standard invoice voucher. At no time shall tuition be paid or reimbursed prior to completion of the course.

5) Course Load: Course load should be mutually agreed upon by the employee and his or her supervisor and should not harm an employee's on-the-job effectiveness.

6) Course Scheduling: Education and/or career development work should be scheduled as an off-duty activity. When a desired course is not available as an off-duty activity, an employee may use vacation or personal time. An employee and his or her supervisor may also arrange a flexible work schedule, provided such a schedule does not adversely affect work loads in his or her unit of assignment.

7) Full Participation: Priority should be given to those courses in which full participation is required on a regular basis and where final grades are issued since such conditions provide a reasonable basis against which satisfactory completion can be measured. In those cases where facilities for full participation in classroom instruction are not available or where attendance creates undue hardship, an agency director may approve enrollment in V.A. approved correspondence courses.

8) Degree Program: Reimbursement may be approved for work-related courses which are taken to complete requirements for a grammar school certificate or high school diploma, and for courses that lead to the upgrading of skills for the performance of an employee's assigned work responsibilities. Reimbursement may also be approved for work-related courses toward completion of college or graduate level degree programs.

9) Enrollment: Applicants will be required to gain approval from their supervisors and agency director (or authorized representative) prior to course enrollment.

10) Aid From Other Source: In applying for tuition reimbursement, an employee will indicate whether (s)he is or is not receiving aid from other sources (such as the G.I. bill, Federal Grants, Scholarships, etc.). The fact that an employee is eligible for or receiving aid from another source does not render him or her ineligible for participation in the Tuition Reimbursement Program. However, tuition reimbursement should be made only toward the balance between the outside aid awarded and the remaining tuition due.

11) Exclusions: Reimbursement is not intended to apply to in-service training conducted within the agency, nor is it intended to apply to workshops, professional conferences, seminars, or other short term programs.

d) Work Commitment/Pay Back. Employees receiving tuition reimbursement from the State shall incur a work commitment to the State.

1) Except as provided in subsection (d)(6) below, if State-paid training did not lead to a post secondary degree, employees shall be obligated to continue in the employ of the State for a period of at least 18 months following completion of the most recent course.

2) If State-paid training did lead to a post secondary degree (i.e., Bachelors, Masters or other higher level professional or post graduate degree) and the State paid for 50% or more of the hours required to earn the degree, employees shall be obligated to continue in the employ of the State for a minimum of four (4) years after receiving the degree. Course work begun before January 1, 1992, shall not be counted as part of the 50% requirement under this Section.

3) The tuition reimbursement agreement that is executed pursuant to this Section may require the employee to provide written status reports on his/her progress toward receiving a post secondary degree.

4) If the employee voluntarily leaves State employment prior to fulfilling this work commitment, the agency that paid the tuition may recover payments in addition to interest at the rate of 1% per month from the time the State makes the payment until the time the State recovers the payment.

5) The amount owed by an employee shall be reduced by 25% for each year the employee works for the State after the employee receives a post secondary degree, or by 1/18th of the gross amount for each month the employee works for the State after completing the most recent course which does not lead to a post secondary degree.

6) This Section may not be used as the basis for recovering payments for course work that was started before January 1, 1992; was completed as a requirement for a grammar school certificate or a high school diploma; was to prepare for a high school level General Educational Development Test or to improve literacy or numeracy; specialized training in the form of a conference, seminar, workshop or similar arrangement offered by public or private organizations; was provided as part of the Upward Mobility Program administered by the Department of Central Management Services; or was a condition of continued employment.

(Source: Added at 19 Ill. Reg. 8130, effective June 7, 1995)