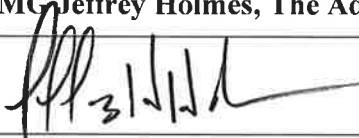




GUIDELINES

Approved by: MG Jeffrey Holmes, The Adjutant General	Number: S-22-1
Signature: 	Supersedes: S-21-1
Application: Eligible Members of the Tennessee National Guard	Effective Date: 17 March 2022
Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001 et seq. and 58-1-101 et seq.	Rule: Chapter 0930-02

SUBJECT

Guidelines for Implementation of the
 “Tennessee Support, Training and Renewing Opportunity for National
 Guardsmen (STRONG) Act of 2021”

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ANNEX A: The Tennessee Support, Training and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsmen (STRONG) Act of 2021 (T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001 et seq.; Public Chapter No. 216).

ANNEX B: Tennessee Department of Military Rules Implementing the STRONG Act (Rule Chapter 0930-02, as amended).

ANNEX C: List of eligible postsecondary institutions participating in the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement Program.

ANNEX D: Schedule of reimbursement.

ANNEX E: Military education requirement for STRONG Act usage at the graduate level.

MISSION

The purpose of these guidelines is to establish the procedures to be used for administering the “Tennessee Support, Training and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsman” (STRONG) Act of 2021, as amended by Public Chapter No. 216 (Annex A). This Program is administered and managed under the authority and guidance of the Adjutant General of the State of Tennessee, for the purpose of aiding in the recruitment and retention of service members of the Tennessee National Guard.

SCOPE

These guidelines provide guidance and procedures to implement the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement Program, in keeping with Rule 0930-02 (Annex B). As established in the STRONG Act of 2021, these guidelines apply to all eligible Tennessee National Guard (TNG) service members who apply for tuition reimbursement in accordance with these guidelines.¹

The scope of the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is as follows:

1. Payment of tuition reimbursement must be paid directly to an educational institution and not to the TNG service member.
2. The STRONG Act Advisory Board, hereinafter referred to as the “Board,” approves or denies an eligible member’s complete application packet for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement. The application packet process is detailed in these guidelines.
3. These guidelines apply to any STRONG Act tuition reimbursement paid to participating educational institutions, to include public and private educational institutions. The approved list of postsecondary institutions is included in these guidelines (Annex C). Upon approval of an eligible member’s complete application packet, subject to funding availability, the Department of Military may pay a TNG service member’s educational institution, as follows:
 - a. For members seeking a first bachelor’s degree or first master’s degree, the TNG service member must have maintained satisfactory academic progress and received a minimum grade point average of 2.0 for members seeking a first bachelor’s degree or 3.0 for members seeking a first master’s degree, as determined by the educational institution attended for the academic term for which STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is sought.
 - b. For members seeking a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program at a public or private educational institution, satisfactory academic progress and either a minimum grade point average of 2.0, or academic good standing, as determined by the institution, if grade point averages are not utilized by the institution, are required to be eligible for reimbursement. For such programs, an institutional review of a student’s satisfactory academic progress standing need not coincide with the end of each academic term, but timely notification from either the

¹ These guidelines require the collection and/or maintenance of information protected by the Privacy Act of 1974.

member or the vocational or technical program of the member's grades and academic progress is still required to determine eligibility for reimbursement.

- c. The TNG service member must be pursuing either postsecondary semester hours toward a first bachelor's degree; postbaccalaureate semester hours toward a first master's degree; or semester hours or the equivalent toward a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program.
- d. The TNG service member cannot be flagged for suspension of favorable personnel actions at the time he/she submits a STRONG Act tuition reimbursement application. An application received from a TNG service member who is flagged will be denied. However, a TNG service member may reapply for reconsideration, should the flag be removed prior to the application deadline for the semester for which the student seeks benefits.

The only exception is for an Army National Guard SM who has failed the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT): upon implementation of ACFT 3.0 scoring used for administrative personnel actions, the SM will have one year to successfully pass the ACFT before a flag for failure of this test shall constitute cause to deny STRONG Act tuition reimbursement. A current flag for Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) failure is cause for denial of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.

- e. The TNG service member's STRONG Act tuition reimbursement application must be time/date stamped as received by the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 within ninety (90) days of the last day of instruction for the academic term, as determined by the TNG service member's educational institution, for which the TNG service member is seeking STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
 - f. Fees may be paid if they are included in tuition and if they are the same for most students, regardless of discipline, i.e., standard library fees, standard technology fees, etc.
 - g. Fees may be paid if they are required by all students in a unique discipline to complete the degree program, provided the fee is included in tuition and is for a class or lab taught in a traditional academic environment.
 - h. Fees will not be paid, regardless if they are included in tuition, if they are specific to a unique discipline and they are taught outside of the traditional academic environment, including but not limited to aviation flight training fees, nursing co-op fees, fees for courses of study conducted abroad, or any fee listed by the university as a 'special' fee which is not imposed on all or most students attending the university.
- 4. As required by the STRONG Act, tuition reimbursement amounts must be offset and reduced by the aggregate amount of state and federal education financial assistance received for the term for which the TNG service member applies for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, unless otherwise required by federal law.
 - 5. Pursuant to the STRONG Act, TNG service members who are eligible for Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA) must apply for and use any tuition awarded through appropriate service branch, as applicable, before utilizing STRONG Act funding.

LEGAL AUTHORITY

Pursuant to the STRONG Act, the Adjutant General is authorized to promulgate rules, in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5, to effectuate the purposes of this Program (T.C.A. § 49-4-1004(d)).

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001 et seq. and 58-1-101 et seq.; Acts 2021, P.C. 0216, effective July 1, 2021; see also Rule Chapter 0930-02, effective July 22, 2021.

Section I. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The Adjutant General

The Adjutant General (TAG) is vested with the authority to implement Rules to effectuate the purposes of this Program. TAG hereby provides the following guidance, further detailing oversight provisions, which may be changed at any time at TAG's discretion.

- TAG has ultimate authority to approve or deny complete application packets for the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement Program.
- At his or her discretion, TAG may delegate this authority to the Board, under his or her direction and guidance.
- TAG will have sole appellate jurisdiction in the administration of this Program. He or she may delegate the procedural, legal, and/or administrative functions of the appellate process to the Department of Military's Office of General Counsel. In promulgating this guidance, he so delegates until such time as superseding guidelines denotes otherwise.
- TAG will appoint the members to the Board and ensure they meet the intent of and carry out the duties provided in these guidelines and the Program, as set forth in the STRONG Act.
- TAG delegates oversight of day-to-day operations of this Program to the JFHQ G-1/ JFHQ A-1.
- TAG may waive any part of these guidelines or Annex B, to the extent allowed by law, when it is in the best interest of the State of Tennessee and the Tennessee Military Department (Rule 0930-02-01-.10).

2. JFHQ G-1/ JFHQ A-1

The JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 will be responsible for oversight of day-to-day operations of this Program, at the direction and under the authority of TAG. The office will:

- Provide guidance and assistance to TNG service members in completing application packets and assist Commanders, if necessary, to clarify eligibility criteria for the purposes of this Program.
- Supervise State Tuition Assistance Managers to ensure satisfactory performance of duties outlined in these guidelines.
- Coordinate with Board appointees to ensure satisfactory performance of duties, as outlined in these guidelines, rules and statute.
- Ensure application packets are received and processed in a timely manner.
- Designate position responsible for overseeing daily supervisory duties of the State Tuition Assistance Managers in the processing of application packets.

- Ensure proper disposition of recommendations are rendered, by Command staff and the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1, in accordance with the STRONG Act and the Rule.
- Ensure that complete application packets for each eligible applicant are forwarded, as appropriate to the Board for their consideration and determination.
- Oversee the application process, set forth below in Section III.

3. State of Tennessee Military Department

The State of Tennessee Military Department will be responsible for providing certain services, as outlined in Annex B, and as further detailed below:

- The Office of General Counsel for the State of Tennessee Military Department may provide legal guidance to the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1, the Board and to TAG as it relates to administration of this Program. Per the TAG's directives, the Office of the General Counsel will also administer the appeals process.
- The Fiscal Director for the Tennessee Military Department will be responsible for distributing funds to the postsecondary institutions, as specified by the Board as outlined in these guidelines.
- The Fiscal Director for the Tennessee Military Department will outline required data to be collected to ensure accurate forwarding of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement to postsecondary institutions and set timeline for submission of required data.
- The Fiscal Director for the Tennessee Military Department may serve as a non-voting member of the Board, if so designated by TAG.
- Meeting the eligibility criteria as outlined in this guidance does not obligate the State of Tennessee Military Department to award STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
- The approval and award of the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is subject to funding availability. If funding becomes limited, distribution of the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement will be executed in accordance with these guidelines, on a first come-first serve basis (see Annex D.)

4. Commanders

The Commanders, or their authorized designees, will be responsible for reviewing TNG service members' application packets, providing either a recommendation or a non-recommendation for each applicant, based upon the eligibility criteria outlined in these guidelines, rules and statute. The Unit/ Squadron Commanders will also ensure the following:

- TNG service members are informed of the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement Program and the policies outlined herein.
- Monitor TNG service members' continuing eligibility and allow adequate time to counsel those members not meeting standards so that they may take necessary corrective action.
- Provide the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 proper documentation if delegating signature authority to any full-time unit staff member for the purposes of this Program.
- Ensure accuracy and completeness of application packets to include all required items, as outlined in these guidelines, pursuant to rule and statute.
- Sign the application packet in the appropriate section of the application form.
- If recommended, return application packet to the TNG service member for submission.

- If non-recommended, return application packet to the TNG service member and discuss determination for non-recommendation. If a TNG service member is flagged for suspension of favorable personnel actions, the commander will return packet to the TNG service member to remedy the flag or take action to resolve ineligibility, as appropriate.
- Provide a memorandum outlining reasons for determination of non-recommendation; this will be included in the TNG service member's application packet submission.
- Report to the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 any disciplinary actions or additional information that may be relevant to a service member's application for and/or receipt of tuition reimbursement through this Program.
- Ensure TNG service members are aware of the appeals process that is outlined in these guidelines.

5. State Tuition Assistance Managers

The State Tuition Assistance Managers (JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 staff) will be responsible for the receipt, review, and processing of application packets in a timely manner, as follows:

- Review received application packets in a timely manner.
- Verify that Commanders have included their recommendation or non-recommendation and confirm application packets are completed and signed properly by the Commanders or their authorized designees.
- Verify each application packet is complete and accurate. Provide guidance to applicants, as necessary, as to what is required in a complete application packet.
- Educate TNG service members about the Program and instruct them about the application packet process.
- Prepare and provide acceptance letters to eligible TNG service members who have properly submitted application packets for the Board's review to advise them that the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 is in receipt of their application.
- Prepare and provide rejection letters to TNG service members whose application packets are incomplete or inaccurate. Advise the applicant of Appeals process and eligibility to reapply, as appropriate.
- Maintain complete application packets for all TNG service members. Submit applications to the Board for the Board's consideration of the application packets for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, as set forth in these guidelines.
- Maintain a data base or spreadsheet containing accurate information required by the Tennessee Military Department's Fiscal Director.
- Establish points of contact for all eligible postsecondary institutions participating in this Program, listed in Annex C of these guidelines.
- Monitor overall eligibility for TNG service members submitting application packets to ensure compliance with Annex A and Annex B.
- Upon receipt of final course grades and itemized bill, validate information as provided. Review itemized bill to determine exact amount of the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement to be considered for approval. This document, reflecting the amount eligible for potential STRONG Act reimbursement, constitutes a complete application packet.

- Compile complete application packets for submission to the Board for consideration; await Board convening date for follow up action.
- Ensure applicant's complete packets are processed in accordance with the schedule of reimbursement provided in Annex D to prioritize available funding.
- Upon receipt of the Board's determinations, compile data from approved application packets in required format and forward to the Fiscal Director for the State of Tennessee Military Department for payment of the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, as appropriate.
- Return denied application packets to TNG service members with a letter providing information about the appeals process and/or eligibility to reapply, as outlined in these guidelines.
- Counsel TNG service members regarding all education resources available to them; discuss best courses of action that best serves individual TNG service members, as allowed by rule and statute.
- Maintain data required by Tennessee Higher Education Commission and submit a report on or before December 1 or each year the Program is in effect, as required by T.C.A. § 49-4-1007.
- Serve as non-voting members of the Board, if so designated by the TAG.

6. Tennessee STRONG Act Advisory Board

The advisory board consists of members appointed by TAG, to whom TAG grants the authority to review, approve and/or deny complete application packets for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, with directives and guidance of the TAG. The Board will meet as outlined in these guidelines; at the request of TAG, operating upon the recommendation of JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1; and/or, when otherwise directed by TAG or his or her authorized designee.

- The Board will consist of voting and non-voting members.
- The Board will meet at least quarterly, or as required by TAG. Those designated with voting privileges will conduct business, in accordance with these guidelines.
- The Board has the authority to review these guidelines and recommend changes to TAG for consideration. Recommended changes will be reviewed for legal soundness by the Office of the General Counsel prior to submitting them to TAG for consideration.
- The Board will review all complete application packets and vote to approve or deny each of them for a potential award of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
- The Board's decisions will be documented for the record and relayed to the JFHQ G-1/ JFHQ A-1 for all necessary follow up action.

The Board will consist of members appointed by TAG. Voting and non-voting members may include, but are not limited to, the below referenced positions. TAG may change Board appointments at his or her discretion when it is in the best interest of the Program, and when such change is not in violation of statute or Rule.

- **Non-voting members may include:**
 - JFHQ G-1 (Army)
 - JFHQ A-1 (Air)

Education Services Officer (Army)
State Tuition Assistance Managers (Air & Army)
Representative from the Department's Office of General Counsel
Representative from the Department's Office of Fiscal Director

- **Voting members may include:**
 - Senior NCO from Field Unit (Army)
 - Senior NCO from Field Unit (Air)
 - Sergeant Major from JFHQ (Army or Air) or Senior NCO designee (must be E-8 or higher).

Voting members may not include any personnel assigned to the Education Services Office to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

7. Tennessee National Guard Members

The TNG service member will be responsible for reviewing Annex A, Annex B, and these guidelines to gain a detailed understanding of the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement Program. The TNG service member is required to meet the eligibility criteria and must follow directions in these guidelines when completing application packets. TNG service members' responsibilities include the following:

- Ensure eligibility criteria are met, as outlined in these guidelines, Departmental Rule, and the STRONG Act of 2021.
- Enroll in postsecondary institution, listed in Annex C of these guidelines.
- Apply for and use Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA), if eligible, through appropriate service branch as applicable.
- Accurately prepare an application packet as outlined in these guidelines and submit it timely to the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1, as required.
- Obtain Commander's recommendation or non-recommendation on appropriate form prior to submission of application packet to JFHQ G-1/ JFHQ A-1.
- Submit a release to their educational institution that explicitly allows lawful release of student records or other information requested by the TNG during the application process.
- Ensure final grades and an itemized bill for the courses for which STRONG Act tuition reimbursement application is made are received by the State Tuition Assistance Managers; this documentation is required to complete an application packet.
- Note that only complete application packets will be considered by the Board for any award of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement. The TNG service member must ensure completion of his or her application.
- Provide any transcripts that reflect prior postsecondary education credits that can be used to apply toward a first bachelor's or master's degree. Note that the STRONG Act restricts reimbursement to a total number of attempted semester hours to a maximum of 120 semester hours for a bachelor's degree or 40 semester hours for a master's degree. It also restricts reimbursement through this Program to 8 full-time semesters (or 8 semester equivalent terms if an education institution is on a system other than a semester system) for a bachelor's degree.

- Provide a copy of course/ degree plan from chosen postsecondary institution after completion of nine (9) credit hours, to include transfer hours, when applying for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
- Course/ degree plan must include any prior credits and detail remaining required courses needed to fulfill degree requirements.
- Prepare application packet and ensure time/date stamped received by the State Tuition Assistance Managers within ninety (90) days of last day of instruction for the academic term, as determined by the postsecondary institution for which STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is being sought.
- Note that it is the Department's recommendation to submit application packets as soon as possible, after registering for courses with chosen postsecondary institution, to ensure adequate time to process application packet. Tuition reimbursement is subject to funding availability (see schedule of reimbursement, Annex D of this guidance).
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress and receive a minimum grade point average of 2.0 for a bachelor's degree and 3.0 for a master's degree, as determined by the postsecondary institution, for the academic period which STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is being sought. For members seeking a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program at a public or private educational institution, satisfactory academic progress and either a minimum grade point average of 2.0, or academic good standing, as determined by the institution, if grade point averages are not utilized by the institution, are required to be eligible for reimbursement. For such programs, an institutional review of a student's satisfactory academic progress standing need not coincide with the end of each academic term, but timely notification from either the member or the vocational or technical program of the member's grades and academic progress is still required to determine eligibility for reimbursement.
- Respond to inquiries from State Tuition Assistance Managers for any information required to process application packet.

Section II. Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to apply for the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement as outlined in Annex B and these guidelines, the TNG service member must satisfy all of the following conditions:

- Currently be serving in the Tennessee National Guard, either Army or Air components.
- Cannot be flagged for suspension of favorable personnel actions at the time the application is submitted but may be submitted to commanders for reconsideration once flag is removed, as provided above.
- TNG service members who are eligible for Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA) must apply for and use any tuition awarded through appropriate service branch as applicable.
- TNG service members who used the STRONG Act for any portion of their bachelor's degree must meet certain military education benchmarks as annotated in Annex E prior to receiving STRONG Act funds for a master's degree.
- Must have served in the Tennessee National Guard for at least a portion of the applicable academic term for which an application for STRONG Act tuition is

submitted, provided that a member's term of service may not expire during any academic term for which reimbursement is requested.

- Must be pursuing postsecondary credit hours toward a first bachelor's degree not to exceed 120 semester hours, 8 full-time semesters or equivalent if education institution is on a system other than a semester system; a master's degree not to exceed 40 hours semester hours; or a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program.
- Obtain a completed form by the member's Commander and/or Recruit Sustainment Program Administrators regarding their recommendation for application.
- Maintain a 2.0 grade point average for a bachelor's degree and 3.0 for a master's degree for the academic term for which the TNG service member applies for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement. For members applying for reimbursement for a vocational or technical program, a 2.0 grade point average is required, or if the program does not utilize grade point averages, academic good standing, as determined by the institution.
- Must have submitted their application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement within ninety (90) days of the last day of instruction for the applicable academic period.
- Be considered in good standing as outlined in Annex B as defined below:
 1. Has not accumulated nine (9) or more unexcused absences from unit training assemblies, nor failed to attend a scheduled annual training period, within a twelve (12) month period prior to the receipt of the TNG service member's application, unless the TNG service member produces documentation, showing that the TNG service member had obtained proper permission from his or her unit commander excusing the absence.
 2. Has not missed a "ship date," or departure date, basic military training before the first day of class for the semester, trimester, quarter, or academic term for which an application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, unless the TNG service member produces documentation, showing that the TNG service member had obtained proper permission from his or her Unit/ Squadron Commander excusing the absence.

**ship date* for purposes of this Program refers to the date a TNG service member departs to begin basic military training

3. May be deemed ineligible if under any disciplinary issues or pending charges described in directives from the Board to TAG.

Section III. How to Apply for STRONG Act Tuition Reimbursement

The application process for the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement Program as outlined in these guidelines details requirements set out in Annex A and Annex B.

1. The Application Packet Process

Eligible TNG service members may prepare an application packet. It is recommended that the TNG service member submit an application packet soon after registering with chosen

postsecondary institution to ensure adequate funds are available and allow time to accurately review the application packet.

1. Enroll in any one of the postsecondary institutions (included in Annex C) participating in the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement Program.
2. Use web link at www.tn.gov/military/section/education-incentive to obtain application form, enrollment certification form, authorization for release form, statement of understanding (SOU), and application packet checklist.
3. Follow directions on forms and provide accurate information as requested.
4. Provide required items in Section III of the application form to JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1:
 - ✓ Statement of Understanding (SOU)
 - ✓ Enrollment verification form (completed by school)
 - ✓ Course/ Degree plan from chosen postsecondary institution
 - ✓ Official/ Unofficial transcripts (not applicable if you are first time college student)
 - ✓ Authorization to release information form (for submission to educational institution)
5. Submit application packet with checklist as cover document to Commander and/or Recruit Sustainment Program Administrator for review completion, indicating their recommendation or non-recommendation. Commanders or Recruit Sustainment Program Administrators must provide a memorandum detailing any reasons for non-recommendation for the Board's consideration for tuition reimbursement (this will be included with submission of initial application packet and reviewed by the board when application is complete).
6. Submit application packet to the appropriate component email:

ARMY: ng.tn.tnarng.mbx.ngtn-state-tuition-assistance-army@mail.mil

AIR: ng.tn.tnarng.mbx.ngtn-state-tuition-assistance-air@mail.mil

7. The State Tuition Assistance Managers will receive application packets and review for accuracy and completeness.

IMPORTANT: In the event of a possible funding shortfall, to guarantee payment, assuming the applicant has met all other requirements, applicants must have the application packet submitted no later than 1 April for Spring semesters; 1 May for Summer semesters; and 1 November for Fall semesters. Students will still have ninety (90) days to turn in final grades. The JFHQ G-1/A-1 will post public notice in the event a funding shortfall is anticipated.

8. If the application packet is properly prepared, an acceptance letter will be provided to the TNG service member outlining requirements for submission of a complete application packet. Only complete application packets will be considered by the Board for any award of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
9. If the application packet is rejected or denied, a letter will be provided to the TNG service member, outlining reasons for rejection or denial.

10. The TNG service member may file an appeal to the Adjutant General or re-submit an application packet once the reasons for rejection or denial are remedied.

2. Complete Application Packet Process

It is essential that the applicant understands that only a complete application packet, consisting of the accepted application packet from an eligible TNG service member **with the addition of submission of final grades and itemized bill** for the courses for requested reimbursement in the application packet. It is the responsibility of the TNG service member to ensure receipt of the final grades and itemized bill to the State Tuition Assistance Managers, at which point the applicant will have submitted a complete application packet.

1. Only complete application packets will be considered for any award of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
2. Complete application packets will be submitted to the Board for consideration as outlined in Annex B and these guidelines.
3. Determinations of the Board rendered based upon complete application packets will be returned to the JFHQ G-1/ JFHQ A-1 for follow up action, as appropriate.
4. Approved complete application packets will be time/date stamped as approved for an award. The JFHQ G-1/ JFHQ A-1 will forward required data to the Fiscal Director for the Tennessee Military Department for payment of the Board's award of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
5. An approval letter will be prepared and forward to the TNG service member, apprising them of the approval of their complete application packets for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
6. Denied complete application packets will be time/date stamped designating the Board's decision and returned to the State Tuition Assistance Managers for processing. A denial letter will be prepared and forwarded to the TNG service member with instructions as to how to appeal the Board's decision, as outlined in these guidelines.

Section IV: Appeals Process

Any TNG service member who applies for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement may prepare and submit an appeal to the Adjutant General. The TAG has ultimate authority for appellate consideration, in accordance with Annex B and the STRONG Act of 2021. The appeals process is as follows:

1. The TNG service member has thirty (30) calendar days from time/ date stamp of the Board's determination to submit an appeal to the Office of the Adjutant General for his or her consideration.
2. The appeal may be submitted to:

The Office of the Adjutant General
c/o The Office of the General Counsel, Suite 101
3041 Sidco Drive
Nashville, TN 37204

3. An appeals packet will consist of the following items:

- ✓ The original application materials;
 - ✓ A statement from the TNG service member, outlining reason(s) for requesting re-consideration of the award of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement;
 - ✓ Any additional documentation that is relevant to the appeal; and
 - ✓ Letter of endorsement from Unit/ Squadron Commander which explains whether or not he or she is recommending TAG's re-consideration and why he or she is or is not recommending reimbursement.
4. The appeals packet will then be time/ date stamped as received by the Office of the General Counsel on behalf of TAG.
 5. The Office of the General Counsel will complete a thorough and neutral investigation relevant to the request for appeal, under the guidance and direction of TAG.
 6. Upon completion of the investigation, a determination letter will be forwarded to the TNG service member detailing decisions rendered.
 7. The JFHQ G-1/ JFHQ A-1 will be carbon copied on said letter to field any follow-up, as directed by TAG.
 8. Questions regarding the Appeals process by be directed to the Office of the General Counsel at (615) 313-0658.

GLOSSARY

The terms that follow shall have the following meanings, as set forth in rule of implementation of the “Tennessee Support, Training, and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsman (STRONG) Act of 2021”.²

1. ***STRONG Act tuition reimbursement:*** Reimbursement for tuition pursuant to the Tennessee Support, Training, and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsmen (STRONG) ACT of 2021 and subject to all conditions and restrictions therein and in rules and guidelines.
2. ***Educational institution:*** Any public university, college, community college, college of applied technology, or any private college or university that is regionally accredited and has its primary campus located within the state of Tennessee.
3. ***Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA):*** The FTA is distinct from and should not be confused with other tuition assistance programs that are federally funded, such as Montgomery GI Bill benefits and Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. The FTA is a military tuition assistance program for which certain members of the National Guard are eligible, according to applicable federal regulation.
4. ***Tennessee Support, Training and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsman Advisory Board (The Board):*** The Program advisory board, also referenced herein as the Board, is an advisory board to which the Adjutant General appoints Board members, and to whom the Adjutant General delegates the authority to review, approve or decline applications for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, as set forth in Rules Annex B and in accordance with Departmental guidelines.
5. ***Joint Force Headquarters Army National Guard G-1 (JFHQ G-1) / Joint Force Headquarters Air National Guard A-1 (JFHQ A-1):*** The JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1, or such office as named by the Adjutant General, is the office the Adjutant General has authorized to have primary responsibility for day-to-day operations for the Program, the Tennessee Army National Guard, and the Tennessee Air National Guard service members, respectively.
6. ***Application Packet:*** This is the first part of the application process for consideration of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement. An application form, enrollment certification form, an applicant’s signed authorization for school’s release of information, statement of understanding (SOU), and application packet checklist will be available from a webpage. Instructions are outlined in Section III of these guidelines.
7. ***Tuition:*** the total semester, quarter, or classroom hour cost of instruction delineated in the catalog of an educational institution, including all mandatory fees.
8. ***Semester hour:*** Semester hour means the credit hour used by an educational institution, if the institution is on a semester system, or its equivalent if the institution

² Where any conflict arises as between the terms defined in the STRONG Act and in these guidelines, the statutory definition, and if not statutorily defined, the definition section of the Departmental Rule implementing said statute, will take precedence.

is on a system other than a semester system, and includes each semester hour attempted, whether remedial or for credit toward a degree, but does not include any semester hour attempted before graduating from high school or earning a high school equivalency diploma.

9. **Attempted semester hour:** semester hour(s) for a course dropped prior to the add/drop date for that course will not be counted as attempted semester hours toward the maximum number of reimbursable semester hours permitted for the type of program (certificate or diploma, bachelor's, or master's) for which the TNG service member is seeking reimbursement.
10. **Credit hour:** includes but is not limited to a clock hour for programs that utilize clock hours instead of credit hours, using the conversion formula utilized by the U.S. Department of Education for federal Title IV student aid purposes under applicable federal regulation.
11. **Officer-producing program:** a reserve officer training corps program offered through a college or university.
12. **Good standing:** A service member of the Tennessee National Guard is considered to be in good standing for the purposes of this Program:
 - a. if he or she, at the time the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 time/date stamps the application for STRONG Act reimbursement as received:
 - i. has not accumulated nine (9) or more unexcused absences from unit training assemblies, nor failed to attend a scheduled annual training, within a twelve (12) month period prior to the time/date stamped receipt of the TNG service member's application, unless the TNG service member produces documentation, showing that the TNG service member had obtained proper permission from his or her unit commander excusing the absence; and
 - ii. has not missed a ship date to complete basic military training before the first day of class for the semester, trimester, quarter, or academic term for which the TNG service member has submitted an application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, unless the TNG service member produces documentation, showing that the TNG service member had obtained proper permission from his or her unit commander excusing the absence; and
 - b. for members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a first bachelor's degree,
 - i. have filed a course/degree plan with the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 after the completion of nine (9) credit semester hours, which course/degree plan will detail all required courses needed to fulfill degree requirements; and
 - ii. after earning twelve (12) semester credit hours, the TNG service member must have declared a major. If the TNG service member has completed twelve (12) credit semester hours at the time that the application for tuition reimbursement is time/date stamped as received, the TNG service member must include his or her declared major in the TNG service member's application for tuition reimbursement. If a

TNG service member's major has changed, the new major must be reflected on subsequent applications for tuition reimbursement and course/degree plans;

- c. for members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a first master's degree, notice of the specific degree sought and a course/degree plan detailing all required courses needed to fulfill degree requirements must be filed with the member's first application seeking reimbursement; and
- d. for members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a certificate or diploma in a vocational or technical program, notice of the specific certificate sought and a course plan detailing all required courses needed to obtain the certificate must be filed with the member's first application seeking reimbursement; and
- e. the Board must have deemed the TNG service member to be in good standing, after having reviewed relevant information obtained through the application process, at the direction and under the authority and guidance of the Adjutant General.

13. ***Complete Application Packet:*** This is the final part of the application process for consideration of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement. A complete application packet consists of the following: an accepted application packet, final course grades and itemized bill for which application packet was accepted.

Only complete application packets will be submitted for consideration by the Board. Instructions are outlined in Section III of these guidelines.

14. ***Satisfactory academic progress:*** As used in these guidelines, satisfactory academic progress means the TNG service member must have earned a minimum grade point average of 2.0 for an associate's or bachelor's degree or 3.0 for a master's degree as determined by the postsecondary institution; or 2.0 for members in vocational or technical programs, or for members in vocational or technical programs that do not utilize a grade point average, achieve academic good standing as determined by the vocational or technical program; for the academic period for which the TNG service member submits an application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.

Annex A: The Tennessee Support, Training and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsmen (STRONG) Act of 2021 (T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001 et seq.; Public Chapter No. 216).



State of Tennessee

PUBLIC CHAPTER NO. 216

HOUSE BILL NO. 83

By Representatives Lamberth, Gant, Moon, Hall, Powell, Griffey, Ragan, Jernigan, Powers, Garrett, Hawk, Crawford, Chism, Boyd, Wright, Whitson, Camper, Windle, Sparks, Vaughan, Halford, Carr, Russell, Howell, Terry, Moody, Reedy, White, Darby, Eldridge, Hulse, Smith, Alexander, Faison, Doggett, Campbell, Gillespie, Littleton, Warner, Lafferty, Lynn, Freeman, Thompson, Leatherwood, Stewart, Calfee, Gary Hicks, Bricken, Sherrell, Ramsey, Beck, Haston, Lamar, Jerry Sexton, Hurt, Todd, Curcio, Cepicky, Tim Hicks, Clemmons

Substituted for: Senate Bill No. 755

By Senators Johnson, Powers, Walley, Jackson, White, Yager, Akbari, Campbell, Bowling, Briggs, Gilmore, Haile, Pody, Reeves, Roberts, Rose, Stevens

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4, Part 10, relative to tuition assistance for Tennessee national guard members.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1003, is amended by deleting subdivision (2) and substituting:

(2) "Educational institution" means any public university, college, community college, college of applied technology, or any private college or university that is regionally accredited and has its primary campus domiciled in this state;

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1003, is amended by deleting subdivision (8) and substituting:

(8) "Tuition" means the total semester, quarter, or classroom hour cost of instruction delineated in the catalog of an educational institution, including all mandatory fees.

SECTION 3. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1003, is amended by adding the following as new subdivisions:

() "Educational program" means a program offered by an educational institution through which a student can earn a certificate or diploma, but does not mean a doctoral program;

() "Officer-producing program" means a reserve officer training corps program offered through a college or university;

() "Semester hour" means the credit hour used by an educational institution, if the institution is on a semester system, or its equivalent if the institution is on a system other than a semester system, and includes each semester hour attempted, whether remedial or for credit toward a degree, but does not include any semester hour attempted before graduating from high school or earning a high school equivalency diploma;

SECTION 4. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1004, is amended by deleting subsection (b) and substituting:

(b) Upon successful application by the eligible member attending a public educational institution, the department of military shall pay the educational institution an amount equal to one hundred percent (100%) of the maximum resident in-state tuition charged by the institution attended for the educational program to which the member successfully applied, less all other state or federal financial assistance as described in §

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49-4-1005. Such financial assistance must be credited first to the member's tuition, subject to § 49-4-1005.

SECTION 5. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1005, is amended by deleting the section and substituting:

The following are limitations and conditions on eligibility for tuition reimbursement under the program:

(1) A member must maintain satisfactory academic progress and, for undergraduate, vocational, or technical programs, a minimum grade point average of 2.0, and for a master's program, a minimum grade point average of 3.0, as determined by the educational institution attended for the semester for which the member applies for tuition reimbursement;

(2) A member receiving tuition reimbursement under this part who ceases to be eligible for the reimbursement because the member fails to maintain satisfactory academic progress or the required grade point average at the end of any semester may regain eligibility for tuition reimbursement at the end of any subsequent semester in which satisfactory academic progress and the required grade point average are established;

(3) Tuition reimbursement must be paid to an educational institution on behalf of a member for no more than one hundred twenty (120) semester hours or eight (8) full-time equivalent semesters toward a member's first bachelor's degree. A member ceases to be eligible for tuition reimbursement under this part upon the first of the following events to occur:

(A) The member has attempted one hundred twenty (120) semester hours toward the member's first bachelor's degree, inclusive of any postsecondary semester hours earned prior to receipt of tuition reimbursement under this part;

(B) The member has completed eight (8) full-time equivalent semesters toward the member's first bachelor's degree; or

(C) The member has earned a first bachelor's degree;

(4) Tuition reimbursement must be paid to an educational institution on behalf of a member for no more than forty (40) semester hours toward a member's first master's degree. A member is no longer eligible for tuition reimbursement under this part upon the first of the following events to occur:

(A) The member has attempted forty (40) semester hours toward the member's first master's degree, inclusive of any post-baccalaureate semester hours earned prior to receipt of tuition reimbursement under this part; or

(B) The member has earned a first master's degree;

(5) Tuition reimbursement must be paid to an educational institution on behalf of a member for no more than twenty-four (24) semester hours toward a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program. A member is no longer eligible for tuition reimbursement under this part when the member has attempted twenty-four (24) semester hours toward a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program, inclusive of any semester hours earned in that same vocational or technical program prior to receipt of tuition reimbursement under this part. It is not required that tuition reimbursement under this part apply toward a member's first certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program;

(6) Notwithstanding subdivisions (3) and (4), a member who is enrolled in an officer-producing program at an educational institution is exempt from the semester and semester-hour limits for tuition reimbursement under this part for

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up to thirty (30) additional semester hours for the limited purpose of allowing the member to complete the courses required to accept a commission upon graduation with the member's first bachelor's or master's degree;

(7) Tuition reimbursement amounts that a member is eligible to receive under this part must be offset and reduced by the aggregate amount of state and federal education financial assistance received by the member during the semester or educational term, unless federal law or regulation requires otherwise, in which case federal priority controls. Such assistance includes, but is not limited to, the Tennessee Promise scholarship, the Tennessee Reconnect grant, the Tennessee HOPE scholarship, and similar state assistance, as such assistance programs or grants may be amended, as well as Tennessee student assistance awards, the federal Pell grant, Montgomery GI Bill benefits, Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, and federal tuition assistance program benefits;

(8) Members eligible for federal tuition assistance must apply for and use federal tuition assistance;

(9) Members receiving a reserve officer training corps scholarship must exhaust the benefits of the reserve officer training corps scholarship in order to be eligible for tuition reimbursement under this part;

(10) Members must be in good standing and currently active in the Tennessee national guard; and

(11) Members must submit an application for tuition reimbursement under this part within ninety (90) days of course completion.

SECTION 6. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-1008, is amended by deleting the section and substituting:

This part is repealed on June 30, 2025, unless reenacted or extended by the general assembly prior to that date.

SECTION 7. Sections 1 through 5 take effect July 1, 2021, the public welfare requiring it. All remaining sections of this act take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

HOUSE BILL NO. 83

PASSED: April 8, 2021



CAMERON SEXTON, SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



RANDY MCNALLY
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

APPROVED this 22nd day of April 2021



BILL LEE, GOVERNOR

Annex B: Tennessee Department of Military Rules Implementing the STRONG Act (Rule Chapter 0930-02, as amended).

**RULES
OF
THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY**

**CHAPTER 0930-02-01
RULES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “TENNESSEE SUPPORT, TRAINING AND RENEWING
OPPORTUNITY FOR NATIONAL GUARDSMAN (STRONG) ACT OF 2017”**

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0930-02-01-.01 PURPOSE AND SCOPE.

To establish the Rules to be used for administering the “Tennessee Support, Training and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsman (STRONG) Act of 2017”, hereinafter referred to as the “Program.” The Program is administered and managed under the authority and guidance of the Adjutant General. The purpose of the Program is to aid in the recruitment and retention of service members of the Tennessee National Guard.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017.

0930-02-01-.02 DEFINITIONS.

- (1) The terms that follow shall have the following meanings, as set forth in this Rule:
- (a) Educational institution: Any public university, college, community college, college of applied technology, or any private college or university that is regionally accredited and has its primary campus located within the state of Tennessee.
 - (b) Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA): The FTA is distinct from and should not be confused with other tuition assistance programs that are federally funded, such as Montgomery GI Bill benefits and Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. The FTA is a military tuition assistance program for which certain members of the National Guard are eligible, according to applicable federal regulation.
 - (c) Tennessee Support, Training and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsman Advisory Board (TN STRONG AB): The Program Advisory Board, also referenced herein as the “Board,” is an advisory board to which the Adjutant General appoints Board members, and to whom the Adjutant General delegates the authority to review, approve or decline applications for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, as set forth in this Rule and in accordance with Departmental guidelines.
 - (d) Joint Force Headquarters Army National Guard G-1 (JFHQ G-1)/Joint Force Headquarters Air National Guard A-1 (JFHQ A-1): The JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1, or such office as named by the Adjutant General, is the office the Adjutant General has authorized to have primary responsibility for day-to-day operations for the Program, for the Tennessee Army National Guard and the Tennessee Air National Guard service members, respectively.

(Rule 0930-02-01-.02, continued)

- (e) Tuition: the total semester, quarter, or classroom hour cost of instruction delineated in the catalog of an educational institution, including all mandatory fees.
- (f) Semester hour: Semester hour means the credit hour used by an educational institution, if the institution is on a semester system, or its equivalent if the institution is on a system other than a semester system, and includes each semester hour attempted, whether remedial or for credit toward a degree, but does not include any semester hour attempted before graduating from high school or earning a high school equivalency diploma.
- (g) Attempted semester hour: semester hour(s) for a course dropped prior to the add/drop date for that course will not be counted as attempted semester hours toward the maximum number of reimbursable semester hours permitted for the type of program (certificate or diploma, bachelor's, or master's) for which the service member is seeking reimbursement.
- (h) Credit hour: includes but is not limited to a clock hour for programs that utilize clock hours instead of credit hours, using the conversion formula utilized by the U.S. Department of Education for federal Title IV student aid purposes under applicable federal regulation.
- (i) Officer-producing program: a reserve officer training corps program offered through a college or university.
- (j) Good standing: A service member of the Tennessee National Guard is considered to be in good standing for the purposes of this Program:
 - 1. If he or she, at the time the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 time/date stamps the application for STRONG Act reimbursement as received:
 - (i) Has not accumulated nine (9) or more unexcused absences from unit training assemblies, nor failed to attend a scheduled annual training, within a twelve (12) month period prior to the time/date stamped receipt of the service member's application, unless the service member produces documentation, showing that the service member had obtained proper permission from his or her unit commander excusing the absence; and
 - (ii) Has not missed a ship date to complete basic military training before the first day of class for the semester, trimester, quarter, or academic term for which the service member has submitted an application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, unless the service member produces documentation, showing that the service member had obtained proper permission from his or her unit commander excusing the absence; and
 - 2. For members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a first bachelor's degree,
 - (i) Have filed a course/degree plan with the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 after the completion of nine (9) credit semester hours, which course/degree plan will detail all required courses needed to fulfill degree requirements; and
 - (ii) After earning twelve (12) semester credit hours, the service member must have declared a major. If the service member has completed twelve (12)

(Rule 0930-02-01-.02, continued)

credit semester hours at the time that the application for tuition reimbursement is time/date stamped as received, the service member must include his or her declared major in the service member's application for tuition reimbursement. If a service member's major has changed, the new major must be reflected on subsequent applications for tuition reimbursement and course/degree plans;

3. For members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a first master's degree, notice of the specific degree sought and a course/degree plan detailing all required courses needed to fulfill degree requirements must be filed with the member's first application seeking reimbursement; and
 4. For members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a certificate or diploma in a vocational or technical program, notice of the specific certificate sought and a course plan detailing all required courses needed to obtain the certificate must be filed with the member's first application seeking reimbursement; and
 5. The Board must have deemed the service member to be in good standing, after having reviewed relevant information obtained through the application process, at the direction and under the authority and guidance of the Adjutant General.
- (k) Currently active: A service member of the Tennessee National Guard is considered to be currently active for the purposes of this program if he or she is an active member in the Tennessee Army National Guard or the Tennessee Air National Guard at the time his or her application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is time/date stamped as received by the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 216 of the Public Acts of 2021, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017. Emergency rules filed July 22, 2021; effective through January 18, 2022. Amendments filed October 13, 2021; effective January 11, 2022.

0930-02-01-.03 STRONG ACT TUITION REIMBURSEMENT IS SUBJECT TO FUNDING AVAILABILITY.

- (1) Meeting the eligibility criteria as outlined in Rule 0930-02-01-.06 does not obligate the Tennessee Military Department to award STRONG Act tuition reimbursement. The approval and award of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is subject to funding availability.
- (2) If funding becomes limited, distribution of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement will be executed in accordance with Departmental guidelines.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 216 of the Public Acts of 2021, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017. Emergency rules filed July 22, 2021; effective through January 18, 2022. Amendments filed October 13, 2021; effective January 11, 2022.

0930-02-01-.04 SCOPE OF STRONG ACT TUITION REIMBURSEMENT.

- (1) Payments of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement must be paid directly to an educational institution and not to the Tennessee National Guard member.

(Rule 0930-02-01-.04, continued)

- (2) When the Board approves an eligible service member's application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, and the service member is attending a public educational institution, the Department of Military shall pay the educational institution an amount equal to one hundred percent (100%) of the maximum resident in-state tuition charged by the institution for the type of program (certificate or diploma, bachelor's, or master's) attended, less all other state or federal financial assistance as described in T.C.A. § 49-4-1005. Such financial assistance must be credited first to the service member's tuition, subject to T.C.A. § 49-4-1005.
- (3) Notwithstanding 0930-02-01-.04(2), for service members attending a private two-year college, the amount of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement paid is the average cost of tuition at the public two-year postsecondary institutions, as determined by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation, less all other financial assistance received by the service member. For service members attending a private four-year college or university the amount paid is the average cost of tuition at the public four-year universities, as determined by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation, less all other financial assistance received by the service member. Such financial assistance must be credited first to the amount of the average tuition, subject to T.C.A. § 49-4-1005.
- (4) Notwithstanding 0930-02-01-.04(2) and (3), for service members enrolled in a vocational or technical program at a public or private educational institution for the purpose of attaining a certificate or diploma, the amount of reimbursement shall not exceed one hundred percent (100%) of the tuition, as defined in 0930-02-01-.02(1)(e), for the specific program for which the member is seeking reimbursement, at a public educational institution, less all other financial assistance received by the service member.
- (5) STRONG Act tuition reimbursement amounts which a service member may be eligible to receive under this part must be offset and reduced by the aggregate amount of state and federal education financial assistance received by the service member during the semester or educational term for which STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is sought, unless federal law or regulation requires otherwise, in which case federal priority controls. Examples of such federal and state tuition assistance include, but are not limited to, the Tennessee Promise scholarship, the Tennessee Reconnect grant, the Tennessee HOPE scholarship, and similar state assistance, as such assistance programs or grants may be amended, as well as Tennessee student assistance awards, the federal Pell grant, Montgomery GI Bill benefits, Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, and federal tuition assistance program benefits.
- (6) Service members who are eligible for FTA as defined herein must apply for and use any tuition awarded through FTA.
- (7) The above provisions apply to any STRONG Act tuition reimbursement paid to both public and private educational institutions.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 216 of the Public Acts of 2021, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017. Emergency rules filed July 22, 2021; effective through January 18, 2022. Amendments filed October 13, 2021; effective January 11, 2022.

0930-02-01-.05 PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION.

The Program will be administered by the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 at the direction and under the authority of the Adjutant General.

(Rule 0930-02-01-.05, continued)

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017.

0930-02-01-.06 ELIGIBILITY.

To qualify for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-04-1005, the Tennessee National Guard member must satisfy all of the following conditions:

- (1) The service member must be in good standing as defined in this Rule.
- (2) The service member must be currently active in the Tennessee National Guard as defined in this Rule.
- (3) The service member must have served in the Tennessee National Guard during the applicable academic term for which the application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is submitted.
- (4) For members seeking a first bachelor's degree or first master's degree, the service member must have maintained satisfactory academic progress and received a minimum grade point average of 2.0 for members seeking a first bachelor's degree or 3.0 for members seeking a first master's degree, as determined by the educational institution attended for the academic term for which STRONG Act tuition reimbursement is sought.
- (5) For members seeking a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program at a public or private educational institution, satisfactory academic progress and either a minimum grade point average of 2.0, or academic good standing, as determined by the institution, if grade point averages are not utilized by the institution, are required to be eligible for reimbursement. For such programs, an institutional review of a student's satisfactory academic progress standing need not coincide with the end of each academic term, but timely notification from either the member or the vocational or technical program of the member's grades and academic progress is still required to determine eligibility for reimbursement.
- (6) The service member must be pursuing either postsecondary semester hours toward a first bachelor's degree; postbaccalaureate semester hours toward a first master's degree; or semester hours or the equivalent toward a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program.
- (7) The service member's STRONG Act tuition reimbursement application must be time/date stamped as received by the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 within forty-five (45) days of the last day of instruction for the academic term, as determined by the service member's educational institution, for which the service member is seeking STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 216 of the Public Acts of 2021, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017. Emergency rules filed July 22, 2021; effective through January 18, 2022. Amendments filed October 13, 2021; effective January 11, 2022.

0930-02-01-.07 APPLICATION PROCESS FOR STRONG ACT TUITION REIMBURSEMENT.

- (1) Members of the Tennessee National Guard who meet the requirements of Rule 0930-02-01-.06 may apply for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement using the application process as set

(Rule 0930-02-01-.07, continued)

forth by this Rule and Departmental guidelines, and in accordance with guidance from the Adjutant General.

- (2) Service members must apply for tuition reimbursement through this Program within forty-five (45) days of the last day of instruction for the academic term, as determined by the service member's educational institution, for which the service member is seeking STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
- (3) Service members shall be required to submit a release to their educational institution that explicitly allows their educational institutions to lawfully release student records or other information requested by the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 during the application process.
- (4) Service members must submit completed and signed STRONG Act tuition reimbursement applications to the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 in a timely manner. Upon receipt, the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 will time/date stamp the applications as received, conduct an initial review of the applications for eligibility, accuracy, completeness, and process the applications accordingly. Incomplete or invalid applications may be returned without action by the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 for necessary corrections that would render the application complete and valid.
- (5) The JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 shall submit a form to the service member's unit commander, or his or her designee, which requires the commander, or his or her designee, to report any disciplinary action(s) pending against the service member and document whether he or she would recommend the service member as a candidate for approval of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
- (6) The Adjutant General has ultimate authority to approve or deny applications for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement through this Program. At his or her discretion, the Adjutant General may delegate this authority to the TN STRONG AB, under his or her direction and guidance, in accordance with this Rule and Departmental guidelines.
- (7) The JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 must submit a complete application to the TN STRONG AB for review and approval, in accordance with this Rule and with Departmental guidelines. For the purposes of this Program, a complete application will include all of the following:
 - (a) The Tennessee National Guard member's timely-submitted application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement;
 - (b) The form referenced in 0930-02-01-.07(5), completed by the service member's unit commander or designee, to include his or her formal recommendation as to whether or not to approve the service member's application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement; and
 - (c) The JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1's formal recommendation as to whether or not to approve the service member's application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
- (8) The TN STRONG AB, acting under the authority and instruction of the Adjutant General, may consider the complete, timely application to make a determination as to whether the service member is in good standing and currently active in the Tennessee National Guard for the purposes of this Program. When a service member is deemed to be currently active and in good standing, the Board will consider the application for approval in accordance with these Rules and Departmental guidelines. The Board, in its discretion, may consider all information obtained during the application process, in accordance with these Rules and Departmental guidelines, when making a determination of whether or not to approve a service member's application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement through this Program. However, neither

(Rule 0930-02-01-.07, continued)

the aforementioned recommendations nor any other factor(s) taken into consideration are inherently determinative with regard to the ultimate determination to approve or decline to approve a service member's application for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement through this Program.

- (9) Approved applications will be time/date stamped and returned to the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 for processing STRONG Act tuition reimbursement, in accordance with this Rule and Departmental guidelines. Applications that are declined by the Board will be time/date stamped as declined and returned to the service member, who will have thirty (30) days from the date of the Board's determination to submit an appeal to the Adjutant General for his or her consideration of the Board's decision, in accordance with this Rule and Departmental guidelines.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 216 of the Public Acts of 2021, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017. Emergency rules filed July 22, 2021; effective through January 18, 2022. Amendments filed October 13, 2021; effective January 11, 2022.

0930-02-01-.08 CESSATION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR STRONG ACT TUITION REIMBURSEMENT.

- (1) Eligibility of members to seek tuition reimbursement through this program extends to each eligible member for the full semester-hour limit of each type of program (certificate or diploma, bachelor's, and master's), meaning members may utilize the STRONG Act for multiple degrees and certificates upon demonstration of continued eligibility, subject to availability of funding and Department guidelines.
- (2) Eligibility for STRONG Act tuition reimbursement will permanently cease as to the individual program for which the member is seeking reimbursement upon the advent of any of the following conditions:
 - (a) For members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a first bachelor's degree:
 1. The service member has attempted one hundred twenty (120) credit semester hours, inclusive of any postsecondary credit hours earned prior to receipt of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement; or
 2. The service member has completed eight (8) full-time semesters, as defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-1003(b), or the equivalent of a semester if the educational institution is on a system other than a semester system, as defined in T.C.A. § 49-4-1003(c); or
 3. The service member has earned a first bachelor's degree.
 - (b) Notwithstanding subparagraph (a), for members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a first master's degree:
 1. The service member has attempted forty (40) semester hours, inclusive of any post-baccalaureate semester hours earned prior to receipt of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement; or
 2. The service member has earned a first master's degree.

(Rule 0930-02-01-.08, continued)

- (c) Notwithstanding subparagraphs (a) and (b), for members seeking reimbursement for studies toward a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program,
 - 1. The member has attempted twenty-four (24) semester hours, or the equivalent, toward a certificate or diploma from a vocational or technical program, inclusive of any semester hours earned in that same vocational or technical program prior to receipt of STRONG Act tuition reimbursement.
 - 2. It is not required that tuition reimbursement under this part apply toward a member's first certificate from a vocational or technical program.
- (d) Notwithstanding subparagraphs (a) and (b), a member who is enrolled in an officer-producing program at an educational institution is exempt from the semester and semester-hour limits for tuition reimbursement under this part for up to thirty (30) additional semester hours for the limited purpose of allowing the member to complete the courses required to accept a commission upon graduation with the member's first bachelor's or master's degree.
- (e) Eligibility will cease when a service member is not in good standing as defined in this Rule.
- (f) Eligibility will cease when a service member is not currently active as defined in this Rule.
- (g) All service members applying for tuition reimbursement through this Program are subject to the statutory limitations and conditions as provided in T.C.A. § 49-4-1005. Should a service member fail to maintain satisfactory academic progress and a minimum of a 2.0 grade point average for undergraduate programs, or a 3.0 grade point average for master's programs, or for vocational or technical programs, a minimum of a 2.0 grade point average, or academic good standing, as determined by the institution, if grade point averages are not utilized by the institution, he or she will become ineligible for tuition reimbursement. However, the service member may regain eligibility for tuition reimbursement at the end of any subsequent semester in which satisfactory academic progress and the required grade point average are established and the service member is deemed to meet all other requirements for STRONG Act reimbursement as determined by the Board.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 216 of the Public Acts of 2021, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017. Emergency rules filed July 22, 2021; effective through January 18, 2022. Amendments filed October 13, 2021; effective January 11, 2022.

0930-02-01-.09 OVERSIGHT.

Pursuant to §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., the Adjutant General is vested with the authority to implement rules to effectuate the purposes of this Program. The Adjutant General hereby provides the following oversight provisions, which may be changed at any time at the Adjutant General's discretion:

- (1) The Adjutant General delegates oversight of day-to-day operations of this Program, as directed by the Adjutant General, to the JFHQ G-1/ JFHQ A-1.
- (2) The Adjutant General may appoint Board members to the TN STRONG AB as necessary and vest them with the following authority:

(Rule 0930-02-01-.09, continued)

- (a) The Board members will have voting privileges for the purpose of conducting Board business, in accordance with this Rule and Departmental guidelines.
 - (b) The TN STRONG AB will meet as required by this Rule or Departmental guidelines; or at the request of the Adjutant General, operating upon the recommendation of JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1; or when otherwise directed by the Adjutant General or his or her designee.
 - (c) The TN STRONG AB has the authority to review completed applications that are submitted by JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1 and determine the outcome of the application process, in accordance with this Rule and Departmental guidelines.
- (3) The Department of Military's Office of General Counsel may provide legal guidance to the JFHQ G-1/JFHQ A-1, the TN STRONG AB and to the Adjutant General as it relates to administration of the Program, as necessary.
 - (4) The Adjutant General will have appellate authority and jurisdiction over the administration of this Program. He or she may delegate the procedural, legal, and/or administrative functions of the appellate process to the Department of Military's Office of General Counsel, in accordance with this Rule and Departmental guidelines.
 - (5) Any service member denied STRONG Act tuition reimbursement by the STRONG AB may submit a request for appellate consideration to the Adjutant General, in accordance with Departmental guidelines and this Rule.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 216 of the Public Acts of 2021, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017. Emergency rules filed July 22, 2021; effective through January 18, 2022. Amendments filed October 13, 2021; effective January 11, 2022.

0930-02-01-.10 WAIVER OF RULE.

The Adjutant General may waive any Rule contained in 0930-02-01 not required by statute when it is in the best interest of the State of Tennessee and the Tennessee Military Department.

Authority: Chapter 447 of the Public Acts of 2004, Chapter 229 of the Public Acts of 2017, Chapter 216 of the Public Acts of 2021, and T.C.A. §§ 49-4-1001, et seq., and 58-1-101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed July 29, 2004; effective November 26, 2004. Amendments filed July 13, 2017; effective October 11, 2017. Emergency rules filed July 22, 2021; effective through January 18, 2022. Amendments filed October 13, 2021; effective January 11, 2022.

Annex C: List of eligible postsecondary institutions participating in the STRONG Act tuition reimbursement Program.



UNCLASSIFIED

FTA & TN STRONG Act Approved Schools



Universities

- Austin Peay State University*
- East Tennessee State University*
- Middle Tennessee State University*
- Tennessee State University
- Tennessee Technological University
- University of Memphis
- University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
- University of Tennessee, Knoxville*
- University of Tennessee at Martin

Community Colleges

- Chattanooga State Technical Community College*
- Cleveland State Community College
- Columbia State Community College
- Dyersburg State Community College*
- Jackson State Community College
- Motlow State Community College
- Nashville State Community College*
- Northeast State Community College
- Pellissippi State Community College*
- Roane State Community College
- Southwest Tennessee Community College
- Volunteer State Community College*
- Walters State Community College

Private Post-Secondary Educational Institutions

- Aquinas College
- Belmont University
- Bethel University*
- Bryan College*
- Carson-Newman University
- Cumberland University
- Fisk University
- Freed-Hardeman University
- Huntington College of Health Science
- Johnson University
- King University*
- Lane College
- Lee University*
- LeMoyne-Owen College
- Lincoln Memorial University
- Lipscomb University*
- Martin Methodist College
- Maryville College
- Milligan College
- North Central Institute
- Pentecostal Theological Seminary
- South College
- Southern Adventist University
- Tennessee Wesleyan University
- Trevecca Nazarene University
- Tusculum University*

*** LOI Partner Schools that offer Deferment for TN STRONG Act program
Eligible for use at Tennessee College's of Applied Technology (TCAT);
check campus locations for available courses.**

Annex D: Schedule of reimbursement.

Reimbursement prioritization will be calculated based on receipt dates of completed packets, which will occur at the end of the semester.

In the event of a funding shortfall, reimbursement to eligible members of the Tennessee National Guard whose applications for tuition reimbursement have been approved will be disbursed according to the date the **completed** application is received. In accordance with Rule 0930-02-01-.07(4), it is the Service Member's responsibility to ensure a complete application packet is received within the ninety (90) day deadline by the State Tuition Assistance Managers, specifically including final grades and an itemized bill for the courses for which STRONG Act tuition reimbursement application is made.

Annex E: Military Education Requirement for STRONG Act usage at the graduate level.

TNG service members who used the STRONG Act to fund any portion of their undergraduate degree, have attained a bachelor's degree, and wish to pursue a master's degree will establish funding eligibility upon graduation from advanced leadership training. Advanced leadership training is defined as:

ARMY

Advanced Leaders Course (ALC) for enlisted Soldiers

Warrant Officer Advanced Course (WOAC) for Warrant Officers

Captains Career Course (CCC) for Officers

AIR

Airmen Leadership School (ALS) for enlisted Airmen

Squadron Officer School (SOS) for Officers

There is no advanced leadership training requirement if STRONG Act tuition reimbursement was NOT used to fund any portion of undergraduate work, however, Basic Active Duty Training (Army) or Basic Military Training *and* Technical Training (Air Force) must be complete before a SM may apply for funding towards a graduate program.