

## STATE OF TEXAS OFFERS SPECIAL BENEFITS TO SURVIVORS OF THOSE KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY

The Texas Legislature enacted Chapter 615 of the Texas Government Code to provide death benefits for eligible survivors of certain law enforcement officers, fire fighters, and others killed in the line of duty. The program is funded by the State and is administered by the Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS). It is not part of any retirement program.

The benefit paid under Chapter 615 is available only when the individual suffers a death occurring during the performance of his or her duty and resulting from exposure to a risk inherent in the particular duty performed or a risk to which the general public is not customarily exposed. There are no age or length-of-service eligibility requirements for this benefit. Payments made under Chapter 615 are in addition to any other benefits for which the survivors of deceased individuals may be eligible (example: federal benefits and educational benefits).

### **Who qualifies for Chapter 615 benefits?**

This program may be available to survivors of the following individuals:

- Certified Peace Officers (as defined by Article 2.12 of the Criminal Procedure Code),
- employees subject to certification by the Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP),
- members of organized volunteer fire fighting, police reserve, or auxiliary units,
- members of Emergency Medical Service units,
- Custodial Officers of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ),
- employees whose principal duties are aircraft crash and rescue fire fighting, and
- others as defined by Chapter 615 of the Government Code.

### **Chapter 615 benefits**

- A Lump Sum Payment of \$500,000 from the State for the surviving spouse, or in equal shares, to the surviving children or parents
- Possible State-paid funeral expenses if the deceased was a Certified Peace Officer or was employed by TDCJ (TX Gov't Code Section 615.121)

- A possible monthly payment paid by the State to a surviving spouse if the deceased was a Certified Peace Officer or was employed by TDCJ (TX Gov't Code Section 615.121)—The monthly payment would be calculated based on the member's and surviving spouse's ages. The surviving spouse would not receive the payment if he or she receives a monthly payment from another entity.
- A possible monthly payment paid by the State to surviving minor children if the deceased was a Certified Peace Officer or was employed by TDCJ (TX Gov't Code Section 615.122)—The State would pay a monthly payment to a parent or guardian until the surviving children reach age 18: for one surviving child, \$400; for two surviving children, \$600; or for three or more children, \$800. The payment would be made by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.
- Possible health benefits for an eligible surviving spouse if the deceased was a Certified Peace Officer, was employed by TDCJ, or was a fire fighter certified by TCFP (TX Gov't Code Section 615.071)
- Possible health benefits for an eligible surviving dependent child through the employer until the child reaches age 26 if the deceased was a Certified Peace Officer, was employed by TDCJ, or was a fire fighter certified by TCFP (TX Gov't Code Section 615.071)

ERS will work directly with the employer to gather the required information for the Chapter 615 claim process.

ERS will work with the employer to see if the surviving spouse or minor children may be eligible for occupational death benefits.

### **How to apply for Chapter 615 benefits**

The employer can contact ERS directly to initiate the Chapter 615 claim process or the family can contact ERS. ERS will then contact the employer and work directly with the employer to gather the required information for the Chapter 615 claim process.

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For more information on financial assistance available under Chapter 615 of the Government Code, contact:

**Customer Service  
Employees Retirement System of Texas  
Attn: Survivor Benefits  
P.O. Box 13207  
Austin, TX 78711-3207**

**Toll-free: (877) 275-4377**

### **Federal benefits**

The employer can contact the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program about potential federal benefits:

**Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
810 Seventh Street NW  
Washington, DC 20531**

**Telephone: (202) 307-0635 or toll-free (888) 744-6513**

**Fax: (202) 616-0314**

**Email: [PSOB@usdoj.gov](mailto:PSOB@usdoj.gov)**

**Website: [www.psob.gov](http://www.psob.gov)**

### **Educational benefits**

The State also provides an education benefit for the surviving spouse or children. The benefit includes tuition, fees, books, and housing at any public college or university until the student receives a bachelor's degree or 200 hours of credit, whichever occurs first. The college or university administers the program.

ERS will notify the employer that they can contact the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for educational benefits:

**Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
Division of Student Services  
P.O. Box 12788  
Austin, TX 78711**

**Telephone: (512) 427-6101**

**Website: [www.thecb.state.tx.us](http://www.thecb.state.tx.us)**