

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 of Texas 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 resulting from the performance of his or her duty and because of the exposure of risk that is inherent to the job duty 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 to receive (example: federal and educational benefits).

Who qualifies for Chapter 615 benefits?

Chapter 615 benefits may be available to the surviving spouse, child(ren), and/or parents of the following individuals:

- Certified Peace Officers (CPOs) of the state or a political subdivision (as defined by Article 2.12 of the Criminal Procedure Code),
- employees of the state, political or legal subdivision and is certified by the Texas Commission on Fire Protection,
- eligible members of an organized volunteer fire fighting unit,
- individuals who perform emergency medical services, employed by a political subdivision, and are qualified emergency care attendants,
- eligible employees of the Department of Public Safety, Parks and Wildlife Department, and the Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), and
- others as defined by Section 615.003 of the Texas Government Code.

Chapter 615 benefits effective September 1, 2015

- A lump sum payment of \$500,000 from the state for the eligible surviving spouse, child, or parent.
 - If there is more than one eligible surviving child or parent, the lump sum payment would be equally shared among the eligible survivors.
- A possible monthly payment paid by the state to the eligible surviving minor children. The state would pay a monthly payment to the natural parent or legal guardian until the surviving children reach age 18:
 - \$400 each month, if there is one surviving child,
 - \$600 each month, if there are two surviving children,
 - \$800 each month, if there are three or more surviving children.
 - All monthly payments would stop the last day of the month in which the child turns 18 years of age.
 - If there are multiple children, the monthly payments will automatically stop when a child reaches age 18 and adjust accordingly for the remaining minor children.
- A possible monthly payment paid by the state to a surviving spouse if the deceased was a CPO 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 no longer be eligible to receive a monthly payment from the state if he or she becomes eligible for Social Security monthly payments, remarries, or becomes eligible to receive a monthly payment from any other retirement program.
- The state may pay up to \$6,000 for funeral expenses if the deceased was a CPO or was employed by TDCJ (TX Gov't Code Section 615.121).

- The surviving spouse and/or children may be eligible for health and/or dental coverage from the State of Texas if the deceased was a CPO or was employed by TDCJ (TX Gov't Code Section 615.072, 615.074).
- The surviving spouse and/or children may be eligible for health coverage from the deceased person's employer if the deceased was employed by a political subdivision of the state. (TX Gov't Code Sections 615.073 – 615.074).

How to apply for Chapter 615 benefits

The employer or the family can contact ERS directly to initiate the Chapter 615 claim process.

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

Employees Retirement System of Texas
ATTN: SURVIVOR BENEFITS
PO BOX 13207
AUSTIN TX 78711-3207
Toll-free: (877) 275-4377

Federal benefits

The surviving spouse and/or children may need to 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: AskPSOB@usdoj.gov
Website: www.psob.gov

Educational benefits

The state may also provide an education benefit for the surviving spouse or surviving minor children. The benefit may include 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. The surviving spouse and/or children may need to 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 78711-2788
Telephone: (512) 427-6101
Website: www.thecb.state.tx.us