

County Council of Cuyahoga County, Ohio

Ordinance No. O2022-0003

<p>Sponsored by: County Executive Budish</p> <p>Co-sponsored by: Councilmembers Conwell, Sweeney, Baker, Miller, Schron, Tuma and Simon</p>	<p>An Ordinance providing for an amendment to the Cuyahoga County Human Resources Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual (“Employee Handbook”) to create a Tuition Assistance Program to be applicable to all County employees and declaring the necessity that this Ordinance become immediately effective.</p>
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WHEREAS, the County Executive/Department of Human Resources has recommended to amend the Human Resources Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual, otherwise known as the Employee Handbook; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 9.01 of the County Charter, the County’s human resources policies and systems, including ethics policies for County employees, shall be established by ordinance and shall be administered in such manner as will eliminate unnecessary expense and duplication of effort, while ensuring that persons will be employed in the public service without discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, age or ancestry; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary that this Ordinance become immediately effective in order that critical services provided by Cuyahoga County can continue and to provide for the usual, daily operation of a County entity.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY, OHIO:

SECTION 1. Adoption of Revised Human Resources Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual: Council hereby amends the County’s Human Resources Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual (“Employee Handbook”) by adding new Section 10.12, as detailed in the attachment hereto, which amendment shall be effective for all County employees and shall remain in full force and effect and shall be followed by County employees under the authority of the County Council and the County Executive. The Department of Human Resources shall disseminate the amended manual to all employees who are subject to the manual in accordance with the Department’s usual method of dissemination.

SECTION 2. Policies applicable to bargaining employees shall be effective in accordance with state law and any applicable collective bargaining agreement. This

First Reading/Referred to Committee: April 12, 2022
Committee(s) Assigned: Human Resources, Appointments & Equity

Additional Sponsorship Requested: May 6, 2022

Committee Report/Second Reading: May 10, 2022

Legislation Substituted on the Floor: May 24, 2022

Additional Sponsorships Requested: May 24, 2022

[Clerk's Note: Technical correction made by Clerk May 24, 2022]

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Tuition Assistance Program

It is the policy of Cuyahoga County to support and encourage employees to reach their personal goals, to take advantage of educational opportunities to enhance their job-related skills and to promote career development. Acquiring new skills; staying current with best practices and new technology; and gaining access to new information improves employee productivity, creates a pool of qualified and productive staff, and strengthens the County's commitment to promote the economic well-being of its employees.

Participation is voluntary and is not a condition of continued employment.

Eligibility

Employee Eligibility: To be eligible for any form of tuition reimbursement under this program an employee must:

1. Be a full-time, benefits eligible employee as defined section 6.01 Employment Status in the Employee Handbook.
2. Have completed one (1) year of full-time continuous service prior to the date on which the course(s) commences.
3. Be pursuing a degree or taking individual courses at an institution approved by the Human Resources Department. The courses must be related to the employee's current position or a probable future assignment; and
4. Be in active employment status when the course(s) is completed. The resignation, release, or discharge of a participating employee after enrollment, and prior to the class completion date, will result in the employee's automatic ineligibility for a tuition reimbursement.

Eligible Coursework:

1. Program must be offered by an institution approved by Human Resources.
2. Eligible education includes undergraduate and graduate classes and individual credit granting seminars.
3. Does not include conferences or courses required for licensure/certification or to maintain minimum job qualifications.
4. Does not include books, fees, lab charges, travel, mileage, room and board/lodging or other non-tuition expenses.

Reimbursement

1. Grade of "C" or better for undergraduate studies, "B" or better for graduate studies, and a "Pass" or "Completed" for seminars.
2. Classes taken for Audit purposes are not eligible for reimbursement.

3. Maximum reimbursement of \$3,600 per calendar year for undergraduate and graduate study.

Approved Institution

For purposes of this Tuition Assistance Program, Approved Institution means a non-profit, public or private institution of higher education that provides Associate's, Baccalaureate and Master's/graduate programs and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission for the programs being offered, as selected by the Director of Human Resources from time to time through a request for proposals process. The Director of Human Resources shall, no less than once every calendar year notify County employees of those institutions identified by the Director of Human Resources as an Approved Institution.

Procedures

To be eligible to receive reimbursement for educational expenses, employees must follow the following procedures:

- Prior to enrolling in an educational course, the employee must provide their manager/supervisor with information about the course for which the employee would like to receive reimbursement/payment and discuss the job-relatedness of the continuing education.
- At least thirty (30) days prior to the commencement of the course(s), a Tuition Reimbursement Request Form must be completed by the employee, signed by the employee's department head or designee and submitted to the Human Resources Department for approval.
- Once the course(s) have been approved via the Human Resources Department, employees shall execute a Tuition Reimbursement Agreement, which describes the terms under which reimbursement is provided.
- The Human Resources Department will maintain the original Tuition Reimbursement Request Form and all subsequent supporting documentation.
- Once the course is successfully completed, the employee shall submit documented receipts (or outstanding invoices) for tuition payment/reimbursement from the educational institution and documentation reflecting that the employee received the required passing grade or certification of a passing completion to the Human Resources Department.
- Requests for reimbursement received after the commencement of the course will not be approved. **Completing tuition reimbursement documentation or enrolling in a class is not a guarantee of payment. Tuition reimbursement requests will not be authorized unless it is approved by the employee's department head and authorized by Human Resources prior to the begin date of the class.**
- Employees are not permitted to take classes during their working hours under this program.

- The Human Resources Department will coordinate the reimbursement with the Fiscal Office.

Repayment Rules

Should an employee leave County employment for any reason during the three (3) year period following the completion date of the last course taken by the employee, the employee shall be responsible to repay the reimbursement per the following schedule*:

- Within 1 year one hundred percent (100%) of any reimbursements received by the County within the previous 12-month period immediately preceding the employees' last day of employment.
- Within 2 years, seventy-five percent (75%) of any payments made within the previous 12-month period immediately preceding the employees' last day of employment.
- Within 3 years, fifty percent (50%) of any payments made within the previous 12-month period immediately preceding the employees' last day of employment.

The County may make an appropriate deduction toward the outstanding amount from the portion of the employee's final paycheck(s) attributable to any accrued vacation leave, sick leave, compensatory or other time that would be paid to the employee. The County reserves the right to begin or continue the recovery process through all legal means.

*Special circumstances, as it relates to repayment will be reviewed and a determination will be provided by the Director of Human Resources.

Any exception granted by the Director of Human Resources is made on a case-by-case basis. All decisions will be final and not considered a precedent for future requests.