

Emergency Education Benefit Payments

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has authorized checks for up to \$3,000 to be given to students who have applied for educational benefits and who have not yet received their government payment. The checks will be distributed to eligible students at VA regional benefits offices across the country starting Oct. 2, 2009. Citing the distance many Veterans would have to travel to apply in person at a VA benefits office, Veterans can also apply online at www.va.gov. The online application will guide Veterans through the process to supply needed information. Online applicants will receive their emergency payments through the mail after processing.

Students without their own transportation can also request free van service, provided by volunteers, to carry them to the nearest benefits office. To obtain this service, Veterans should call their nearest VA medical center and ask for the "Volunteer Transportation Coordinator." Transportation will be on a first-come, first-served, space-available basis. Whether traveling by personal vehicle or volunteer van, VA officials suggest students check their mail boxes and banking accounts before leaving home, since some Veterans will find their checks have already arrived.

The emergency checks are an advance on each student's education benefits, and the amount will be deducted from future benefits payments. Checks will be written at the regional offices for Veterans who bring a photo ID and evidence of their enrollment. VA officials emphasize that \$3,000 is the maximum payment, with many Veterans receiving smaller payments based upon their likely monthly education benefits. The funds VA will give to students now are advance payments of the earned benefits for housing and books. This money will be deducted from future education payments. VA officials said students should know that after this special payment, they can expect to receive education payments on the normal schedule -- the beginning of the month following the period for which they are reimbursed. Students can check with their college Veterans Counselor for more information.

There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to Veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can also get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office Web site at www.countyofkings.com.

Joe Wright, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call 582-3211, ext. 2662; or e-mail joe.wright@co.kings.ca.us.