

## **John R. Justice Student Loan Repayment Program Agency Guide**

### **Purpose**

The John R. Justice (JRJ) Program provides funding for loan repayment for local, state, and federal public defenders and local and state prosecutors. The purpose of the program is to encourage qualified individuals to enter and continue employment as prosecutors and public defenders.

### **References**

Public Law 110–315—AUG. 14, 2008  
34 U.S.C. § 10671

### **Program Overview**

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Office of Student Financial Assistance, has developed a process for the fair distribution of funding geographically within the state and among state agencies employing state prosecutors, public defenders, and federal defenders. The FDOE solicits applications from state agencies employing prosecutors and public defenders and then receives the nominations of eligible applicants submitted by the employing state agencies. Applicants apply directly to their agency of employment, which decides, based on the programmatic criteria set forth by the U.S. Department of Justice and developed by a working group, which applicants should receive funding.

The allocation for fiscal year 2024-25 is \$97,461.00. Program Funds will be equally distributed between prosecutors and public defenders - \$48,730.50 for prosecutors and \$48,730.50 for public defenders.

### **Important Dates**

November 29, 2024 – Applications due to employing agency  
December 31, 2024 – Agency selections due to FDOE  
March – June 2025 – Tentative award disbursement

### **Applicant Eligibility**

A qualified applicant must be an attorney continually licensed to practice law and shall:

- Be a full-time employee of the State of Florida or unit of local government (including tribal government) who prosecutes criminal or juvenile delinquency cases at the state or local government level including supervision, education or training of other persons prosecuting such cases. Prosecutors who are employees of the federal government are not eligible; or
- Be a full-time employee of the State of Florida or unit of local government (including tribal government) who provides legal representation to indigent persons in criminal or juvenile delinquency cases including supervision, education or training of other persons providing such representation; or
- Be employed in the State of Florida as a full-time federal defender attorney in a defender organization pursuant to Subsection (g) of section 3006A of Title 18, United States Code, that provides legal representation to indigent persons in criminal or juvenile delinquency cases;
- Have an outstanding balance on an eligible education loan;
- Not be in default on repayment of any federal student loans; and
- Make a commitment to:

- Remain employed for at least three years, if a new applicant; or
- Remain employed for at least one year, if the JRJ beneficiary has fulfilled the initial three-year service obligation and is being selected again to receive additional benefits; or
- Complete a Service Agreement Acknowledgement of Benefit, for current JRJ beneficiaries who have not yet fulfilled their initial three-year service obligation, but remain eligible for JRJ benefits.

Attorneys who are in private practice and not full-time employees of a non-profit organization, even if individually or part of a firm that is under contract with the State of Florida or court appointed to provide public defense services, do not qualify as public defenders and are not considered to be qualified applicants.

### **Loan Eligibility**

Eligible education loans include:

- Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) and Federal Direct Stafford Loans;
- FFELP and Direct Graduate PLUS Loans;
- FFELP and Direct Consolidation Loans; and
- Federal Perkins Loans.

Non-eligible loans include:

- Federal Parent PLUS Loans;
- Federal Consolidation Loans used to repay Federal Parent PLUS Loans;
- Defaulted student loans;
- Non-federal student loans (private, commercial or alternative student loans); and
- Any eligible loans that are paid in full.

### **Program Structure**

- FDOE will allocate program funds to each state agency employing qualified applicants. The minimum funding level will be \$100 per agency. See 2024 Final Funding Distribution List.
- To determine the distribution amount, the Department of Legal Affairs (DLA) used personnel data from all of the qualified agencies to determine an average statewide salary for public defenders and an average statewide salary for prosecutors. Once statewide averages were established, DLA applied the Florida Price Level Index to adjust the salaries for cost of living. (*Tab 2 of Eligibility Calculation.*)
- The allocation is based on total number of prosecutors and total number of defenders that fall below their respective adjusted statewide salary average, regardless of how many of those attorneys will be eligible for the program.
- The employing agency will calculate benefits to individual applicants based on a formula that ranks each applicant according to the applicant's ability to pay his or her student loans. The formula accounts for family income, qualifying student loan debt and number of dependents. (*Eligibility Calculation.*)
- Income is based on the applicant's Adjusted Gross Income calculated from the Internal Revenue Service Form 1040.
- Employing agencies will forward a list of recommended applicants to FDOE on agency letterhead indicating how the funds should be distributed to each applicant.
- FDOE will announce award recipients.
- FDOE will remit proceeds directly to the lender/holder of the loan.

### **Program Procedures**

The Application Packet will be distributed by the Justice Administrative Commission to each state agency employing qualified applicants. The application will also be accessible on the FDOE website at [http://www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org/FFELP/John\\_R\\_Justice/John\\_R\\_Justice.html](http://www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org/FFELP/John_R_Justice/John_R_Justice.html).

- By November 29, 2024, applicants must submit an Application Packet to their employing agency with the following documentation:
  - An account statement from the lender showing the applicant's eligible education loan debt and payment history.
  - 2023 Internal Revenue Service Form 1040 (pages one and two.)
- If the Application Packet is incomplete, the employing agency will notify the applicant who will have an opportunity to furnish the missing information. Consideration for an award will be given only if all documents are complete and received by the employing agency by the application deadline.
- FDOE must receive employing agency recommendations and original applications on or before December 31, 2024.
- FDOE will likely distribute funds in March 2025.

### **Selection of Recipients**

- The eligible employing agency shall select recipients from those who have submitted a complete Application Packet with all required documentation.
- Priority, in combination with the following criteria, will be given to prior recipients and those who file timely applications.
- Agencies will rank each qualified applicant according to the *Eligibility Calculation*. Awards will be made to individuals starting with those individuals the formula has determined are least able to repay their student loans.
- Agencies will select applicants who are not receiving benefits under another loan repayment assistance program before selecting applicants who are receiving such benefits.
- Agencies may consider academic achievement (e.g., class rank, GPA, academic honors); meritorious service (e.g., high mark job evaluations); the ratio of the beneficiary's total education debt to total assets; and/or the beneficiary's non-educational debt financial obligations.
- In the event that not enough applicants from a particular employing agency apply, or qualify for, the program, the remaining funds will be reallocated by the FDOE.

### **Contact Information**

Florida Department of Education  
Office of Student Financial Assistance  
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1344  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

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