

AMENDMENT 7 b First Responder and Military Member Survivor Benefits; Public Colleges and Universities

Ballot Language: Grants mandatory payment of death benefits and waiver of certain educational expenses to qualifying survivors of certain first responders and military members who die performing official duties. Requires supermajority votes by university trustees and state university system board of governors to raise or impose all legislatively-authorized fees if law requires approval by those bodies. Establishes existing state college system as constitutional entity; provides governance structure.

How The Amendment Reached The Ballot: Constitution Revision Commission

What Your Vote Means: A **Yes** vote on this measure: (1) provides mandatory death benefits to the surviving spouses of qualifying first responders and military personnel who die in the course of duty; (2) requires an affirmative supermajority vote in order to raise university fees; and (3) cements the current governance structure of Florida's higher education system into the Constitution.

A **No** vote on this measure: (1) does not establish mandatory death benefits to first responders and other military personnel; (2) retains the simple majority necessary to raise college fees; and (3) does not add language regarding the structure of state colleges to the Constitution.

Pro: The measure serves to increase financial transparency in educational institutions across the state. Universities often cloak hikes in tuition prices through nebulous fees. Amendment 7 would require a supermajority vote by the board of trustees to raise the cost of tuition and other fees. This effort ensures that universities cannot spike fees haphazardly or discreetly. Any university board of trustees would require a truly compelling reason to raise tuition. Finally, the amendment assists the families of first responders and military members in a time of need. This gives Floridians the opportunity to provide for those who protect our country. The measure would require the state to provide funds to the families of first responders and military members who die in the line of duty. Family members of the deceased would also receive education expenses. The death benefits would be provided from the general revenue fund and support the qualifying survivors; these survivors are defined by statute.

Con: Opponents of the measure could claim that the language inserted into the Florida Constitution is too vague. Particularly, the language does not define what specific death benefits would be conferred upon the aggrieved groups. Opponents may not dispute the value of providing financial assistance to our fallen veterans but would prefer more clarity before etching language into the state's constitution. Aside from providing for our veterans, the initiative places hurdles on university leaders seeking to ensure that they can address the real costs of education in their tuition rates. Opponents believe the inability to easily raise tuition or fees could lead to gaps in educational services in the future.