

Florida Essential First Responders Recognition Payment Program Allocation Plan

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FLORIDACOMMERCE

Program Allocation Plan

FloridaCommerce – Florida Essential First Responders Recognition Payment Program Allocation Plan

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Program Overview

Under the leadership of Governor Ron DeSantis, FloridaCommerce is supporting the state of Florida's effort to recognize first responders for their sacrifice and contributions to the state through the implementation of the Florida Essential First Responders Recognition Payment Program (Program).

FloridaCommerce administered payments for the Program in Fiscal Years 2021-2022 and 2022-23, which provided up to \$1,000 in individual payments to Florida's first responders for their public service.

Now, for a third year, the Florida legislature approved Governor DeSantis' request for a new round of recognition payments to reward Florida's essential first responders for their public service. Pursuant to Section 234 of the 2023-24 Fiscal Year General Appropriations Act (GAA) \$110,000,000 is allocated for a one-time recognition payment of up to \$1,000, after taxes, for each essential first responder employed by a Florida local government as a Sworn Law Enforcement Officer, Emergency Medical Technician, Firefighter, or Paramedic.

For Fiscal Years 2021-22 and 2022-23, FloridaCommerce worked directly with Florida's local governments to gather the information necessary to make payments to Florida's essential first responders and provide required reports to the Executive Office of the Governor and the Florida legislature. For Fiscal Year 2023-24, local government employers will once again assist FloridaCommerce in gathering additional required information and to make determinations on their employees' eligibility based on the guidance provided by FloridaCommerce.

Eligibility Criteria

FloridaCommerce adopted the eligibility criteria below and will provide these as guidelines to local government employers. Local government employers are responsible for identifying employees that meet these criteria and attesting to their eligibility upon submission of the payment template discussed later in the document.

- Employment Job Classes – The employee must be an essential first responder who is employed by a local government as a:
 - Sworn Law Enforcement Officer
 - Emergency Medical Technician
 - Firefighter
 - Paramedic

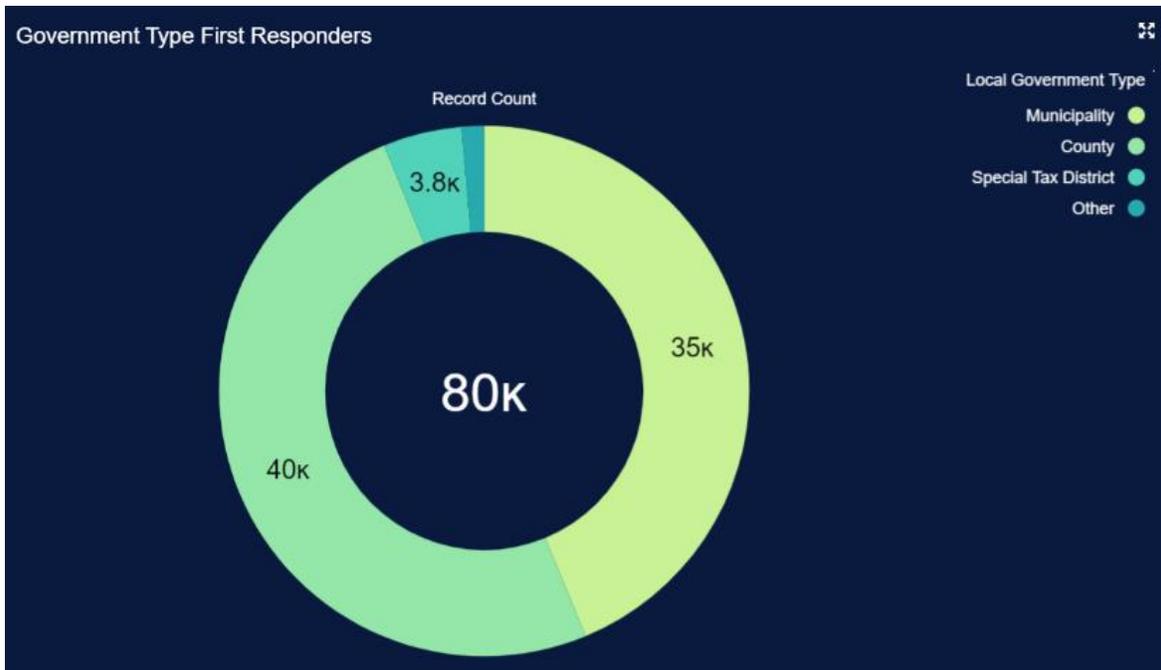
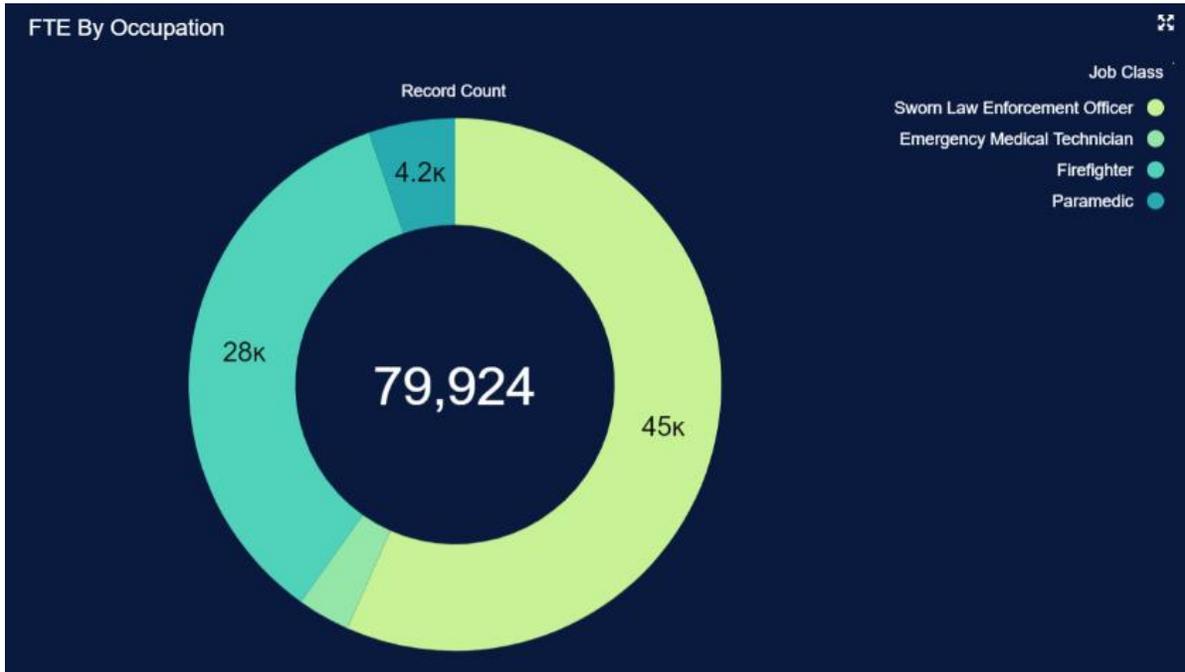
- Employment Period –
 - The essential first responder must be employed by the local government as of June 15, 2023.
- FTE Count –
 - FTE Count 0.25 (the employee works at least 10 hours per week) = \$250 recognition payment, after taxes
 - FTE Count 0.50 (the employee works at least 20 hours per week) = \$500 recognition payment, after taxes
 - FTE Count 0.75 (the employee works at least 30 hours per week) = \$750 recognition payment, after taxes
 - FTE Count 1.00 (the employee works at least 40 hours per week) = \$1,000 recognition payment, after taxes

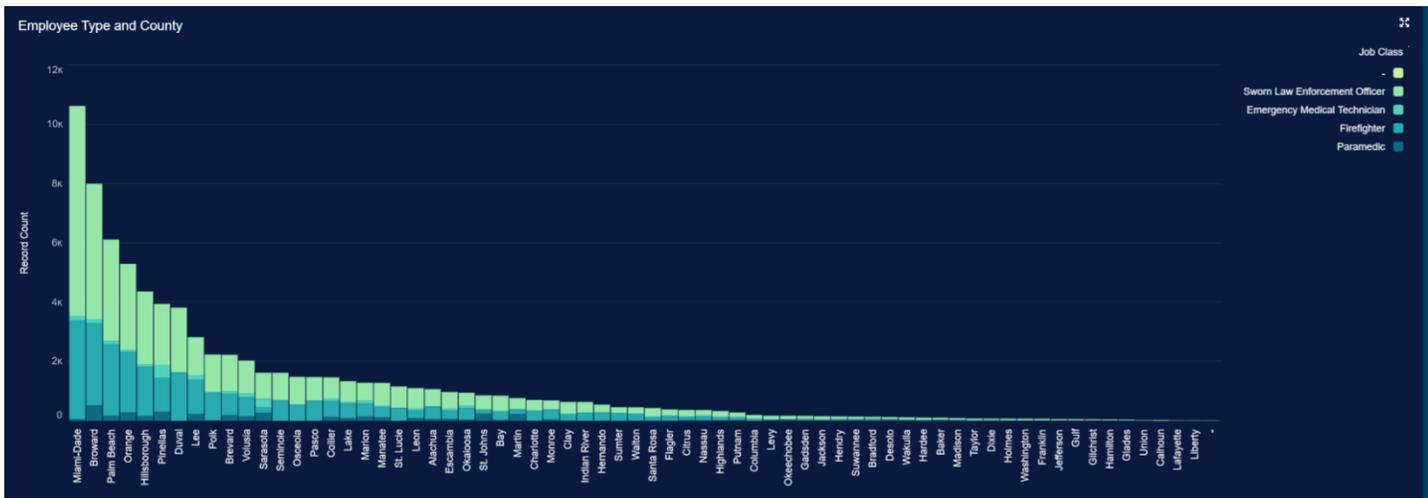
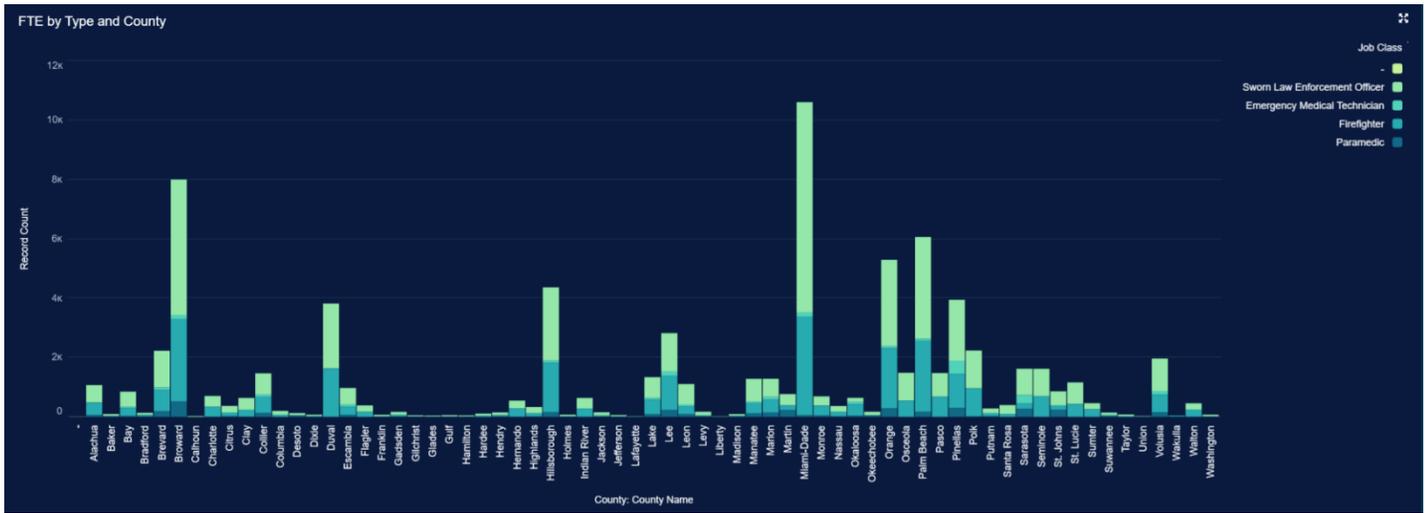
Allocation Method

FloridaCommerce is required to develop a plan for the distribution of one-time recognition payments of up to \$1,000, after taxes, to each essential first responder employed by a local government within Florida. The total payments cannot exceed \$110,000,000. The plan must be submitted to the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the chair of the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee by August 16, 2023.

FloridaCommerce will utilize historic program data to identify each local government agency's Payment Point of Contact (PPC), as well as the estimated number of eligible positions employed as of June 15, 2023. The PPCs are responsible for coordinating the compilation of data about the employing agency's eligible employees and completing the payment template discussed in the next section. Each PPC will attest to the eligibility of their employees when the payment template is submitted.

Year Three Estimates Based on Year Two Data





Year Three Projected Eligible First Responders Based on Year Two Data					
	Total FTE Count 0.25	Total FTE Count 0.50	Total FTE Count 0.75	Total FTE Count 1.0	Total
First Responders in Year Two	269	460	286	78,205	79,220
Dollar Amount Net of Taxes	\$67,250	\$230,000	\$214,500	\$78,205,000	\$78,716,750
*Employee FICA (7.65%), Employer FICA (7.65%) and Federal Income Tax (10%)	\$22,777	\$77,901	\$72,653	\$26,488,723	\$26,662,054
Total	\$90,027	\$307,901	\$287,153	\$104,693,723	\$105,378,804

* FloridaCommerce will send recognition payments to eligible first responders not to exceed \$1,000 net of estimated taxes. FloridaCommerce will issue a tax insert with each recognition payment and will send an IRS Form 1099-NEC to each first responder who receives a recognition payment.

Anticipated Project Cost	
Payments to First Responder	\$105,378,804
System Enhancements, Check Printing, Postage, and Project Management & Support	\$1,100,000
Total Budget	\$106,478,804

Payment Processing

FloridaCommerce will provide each PPC a payment template that is designed to gather all necessary information while incorporating quality assurance and grant documentation. To ensure an accurate allocation, local governments have submitted aggregate numbers of all eligible first responders in the survey discussed in the previous section. While employing agencies may be able to populate many of the payment template details with data from their own systems, the PPC will attest that the employee meets the eligibility criteria.

PPCs will submit and upload the completed payment template to a secure portal provided by FloridaCommerce. This process will allow for faster processing of employee information and ensure timely payment. FloridaCommerce will maintain the information securely, and personal contact information will not be distributed or shared. FloridaCommerce takes the protection of Florida's essential first responders' personal information seriously. FloridaCommerce will only request information necessary to process payments.

FloridaCommerce will utilize third-party vendors for the secure portal support, check processing, and program support, which will include a call center for employing entities to receive assistance.

The secure portal includes the following features and benefits for employing agencies:

- Capability to upload eligible employee data necessary to issue an essential first responder recognition payment.
- Capability to electronically attest to the accuracy of the data as well as identify the address location that will be used for receiving printed checks before any payment is processed.
- Accessibility to program information, instructions and templates.
- Ability for multiple types of users to have secure portal access:
 - Employing Agencies – approximately 800 users will be provided access to upload eligible first responder recipient data files (CSV format).
 - FloridaCommerce – users will be provided access to support employing agencies with answers to questions regarding the Program and their eligible first responder recipient data uploads using the secure portal.
- Data validation to ensure that records are complete and accurate:
 - Data validation will include identifying potential duplicate records, validating program expenditure amounts to adhere to program guidelines and responsibly serving eligible first responders that are employed with multiple employing agencies.
 - Identity verification will be confirmed prior to payments. Data will be compared against the Department of Health’s license database for Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics. Data for Sworn Law Enforcement Officers will be compared against the Florida Department of Law Enforcement’s database. Data regarding Firefighters will be included in the check against the Department of Health’s Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedic license database.
- Data encryption and user access controls will be enabled to secure and protect first responder personal identifying information uploaded through the secure portal.
- Secure data transmission between the secure portal and all other third-party solutions procured by FloridaCommerce to administer the Program. FloridaCommerce’s check processing vendor will utilize encryption and digital signatures with no data stored outside of the secure portal, FloridaCommerce servers or FloridaCommerce’s check processing solution.
- Real-time reporting to be used by both employing agencies and FloridaCommerce to monitor payment requests and payment issuance. FloridaCommerce will also monitor the bank’s Positive Pay system to ensure no fraudulent checks are presented.

All payments will be issued as paper checks and mailed directly to the employing agency’s mailing address provided by the employing agency in the payment template. FloridaCommerce will utilize a vendor to validate mailing addresses. Mailing address issues will be communicated back to the

appropriate employing agency for resolution. It is important for employing agencies to provide complete and correct mailing address information to ensure timely payments.

Check processing services will be provided through a third-party banking entity. That entity, in collaboration with the secure portal vendor discussed above, must provide check processing services that:

- Utilize encryption and digital signatures with no data stored outside of the secure portal or the check processing solution.
- Provide a payment disbursement solution that integrates eligible recipient data with the banking institution to print, sort and mail Program checks on schedule with the correct financial amounts.
- Print checks that include the following:
 - Recipient name
 - Return address (unique PO Box address to be used for undeliverable mail)
 - Logo with the Florida State Seal
 - Governor DeSantis' digital signature
 - Florida Commerce Secretary, J. Alex Kelly's digital signature
 - A payment stub
 - Encoding for bank account/payment details
- Each eligible employee will receive a single envelope with:
 - One check addressed to the employee with tax handling information on the second tab of the check
 - One insert letter from Governor DeSantis, tailored to essential first responders
- Print checks within five days of receiving payment details from the secure portal.
- Mail all checks through a carrier mail service with a tracking number and provide the tracking number to FloridaCommerce.

The checks should arrive at the employing agency's mailing address within three-to-five business days. FloridaCommerce will monitor the delivery of the checks via the carrier service tracking numbers provided by the banking entity. If payment is not received by the employing agency after 10 business days, the employing agency may contact FloridaCommerce directly at RecognitionPayments@commerce.fl.gov or by calling the call center that supports Program payment inquiries. FloridaCommerce may assist with reissuing payment if the check is lost and has not been deposited. Employing agencies should also report

fraud or stolen checks to FloridaCommerce. FloridaCommerce will work with any employing agency to resolve payment issues.