

TEXAS JEWISH POST

Since 1947

DHFLA offers a hand to Jewish students



By Debra Rubin

Mollie Rose guesses that the \$12,000 she received in student loans from the Dallas Hebrew Free Loan Association saved her “thousands of dollars” in interest. She said high interest rates would have left her feeling “stressed if I had to apply for a loan anywhere else.”

She was so enthusiastic about the loans that allowed her, without going heavily into debt, to graduate with a master’s degree in 2019 that she now serves on the association’s board and spreads the word to others, who often know nothing about the loans specifically or DHFLA in general.

While Rose talks up the loans among students and young professionals she meets at Jewish events and elsewhere, Beverly Cavalli and Miriam Zivin — each with two children in college who have taken out the interest-free loans — spread the word to other parents. “A lot of parents don’t even know that this is an option,” Cavalli said. The no-interest part is so important, Zivin said, noting her children have also had to take out federal and private loans with interest ranging from 6% to 10%.

The student loan program is “one of our most popular programs,” said Jane Larkin, the agency’s executive director. As of the end of January, they made up “over 40% of DHFLA’s total loans outstanding and 52% of DHFLA’s total outstanding loan balance,” according to Larkin. With uncertainty about federal loans amid discussions about eliminating the Department of Education, DHFLA is “monitoring that situation and aware of it and hopefully parents in our Jewish community know that we can be a resource for them if there is an impact for our students in federal loans,” said Larkin. “If they are impacted by any changes that may happen with the Department of Education,” DHFLA loans “will fill that gap and hopefully become more valuable,” she said.

The loan stream dates back to the early 2000s, said Larkin, when DHFLA received an \$800,000 bequest from a woman whose father “had taken a small loan in the 1940s and subsequently made a fortune in oil and gas.” The initial loans of \$2,000 per semester went to six students, growing to 84 students by 2008, with \$611,000 disbursed in those first six years.

DHFLA has twice increased the amount of loans since then, now offering \$4,000 per semester.

As of the end of January, 66 loans were outstanding, totaling close to \$730,000, said Larkin. In 2024, DHFLA renewed 50 loans, representing a 39% increase over 2023 and the most student loans in four years. “This may reflect the trend showing an increase in higher education enrollment after years of decline,” Larkin said, pointing to statistics from the National Student Clearinghouse showing post-secondary enrollment was 4% higher than pre-COVID-19 levels.

Under the program, undergraduate and graduate students can apply for interest-free loans up to \$4,000 per semester for a maximum of eight semesters. Monthly loan payments of \$95 begin the month following the loan’s origination and remain at that rate until six months following the borrower’s graduation or withdrawal from school. The payments then rise to \$300 monthly, or 1/72 of the remaining loan balance.

As is typical of student loans, families must provide a [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) report. Borrowers also must have two qualified guarantors, one of whom can be a parent, but a non-parental guarantor is required. Students must maintain a 2.5 grade-point average for loan renewals.

As with DHFLA loans in general, the majority for students are approved, including 92% of student applicants in 2024, according to Larkin. She gave three reasons for denials: The applicant isn’t Jewish, doesn’t live in the association’s Greater North Texas service area or doesn’t meet credit criteria.

“College is so expensive that any little bit helps and it’s only getting more expensive,” said Cavalli. “It’s just been amazing that Jewish students get to use this.”

Borrowers praised the application process. Working with DHFLA “has been such a positive experience,” said Zivin. “It’s a much smoother, more personal process. You’re speaking to a person who can answer questions as opposed to filling out something online.”

Article published: March 6, 2025 in print