

## Chapter 5

# Special Cases

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*There are unusual situations where you will need to exercise your discretion as a financial aid administrator: when modifying data used to calculate the expected family contribution (EFC), performing dependency overrides, resolving conflicting information, reporting cases of fraud, and determining a student to be an unaccompanied homeless youth.*

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While many questions you get as a financial aid administrator (FAA) will have routine answers, some situations will require extra discretion on your part. To account for special circumstances of a student, you may choose to exercise professional judgment (PJ) to adjust a student's cost of attendance or the data that determine a student's EFC. You might decide that unusual circumstances warrant making a dependent student an independent student. If you receive conflicting information for a student, you will need to resolve the discrepancy. In some cases you may discover that a student has been guilty of fraud and should be reported to the Department. And you may need to determine if a student should be classified as an unaccompanied homeless youth.

## Professional Judgment

An aid administrator may use PJ on a case-by-case basis only to adjust the student's cost of attendance or the data used to calculate his or her EFC. This adjustment is valid only at the school making the change. You submit a PJ change electronically, via FAA Access to CPS Online or third-party software, and may do so without a signature from the student or parent. In FAA Access or Electronic Data Exchange (EDE), you must select "EFC adjustment requested" for the professional judgment field. The next ISIR will indicate "Professional judgment processed."

The reason for the adjustment **must be documented** (by a third party if possible), and it must relate to the special circumstances that differentiate the student—not to conditions that exist for a whole class of students. You must resolve any inconsistent or conflicting information shown on the output document before making any adjustments. An FAA's decision regarding adjustments is final and cannot be appealed to the Department.

The statute states that nothing within it shall be construed as limiting the authority of aid administrators to make data adjustments for some situations. However, the law gives examples of special circumstances, such as medical or dental or nursing home expenses not covered by insurance. Use of PJ is neither limited to nor required for the situations listed (see the section entitled "Entire text of the HEA section on PJ" later in this chapter).

Another situation where you might want to use professional judgment involves Roth IRAs. When someone converts a regular IRA into a Roth IRA by transferring funds, the amount converted has to be reported as taxable income on the tax return. Therefore, the income reported on the FAFSA form will be higher than without the Roth conversion, even though the family doesn't actually have additional income or assets available. You can use PJ to reduce the income and taxes paid to the amount that would have been reported if there was no Roth conversion if you think the adjustment is warranted for a student. As with the specific special circumstances listed in the law, you are not required to make an adjustment in this situation.

The law *doesn't allow you to modify either the formula or the tables used in the EFC calculation*; you can only change the cost of attendance or the values of specific data elements used in the EFC calculation. In addition, you cannot adjust data elements or the cost of attendance solely because you believe the tables and formula are not adequate or appropriate. The data elements that are adjusted must relate to the student's special circumstances. For example, if a family member is ill, you might modify the AGI to allow for lower earnings in the coming year or might adjust assets to indicate that family savings will be spent on medical expenses.

*You also cannot use PJ to waive general student eligibility requirements or to circumvent the intent of the law or regulations.* For instance, you cannot use PJ to change FSEOG selection criteria. Nor can you include post enrollment activity expenses in the student's COA. For example, professional licensing costs to be incurred after the enrollment period would not be includable (though one-time licensing costs incurred during the enrollment period may be—see *Cost of Attendance in Volume 3, Chapter 2*).

Occasionally aid administrators have made decisions contrary to the professional judgment provision's intent. These

“unreasonable” judgments have included, for example, the reduction of EFCs based on recurring costs such as vacation expenses, tithing expenses, and standard living expenses (e.g. utilities, credit card expenses, children’s allowances, etc.). Aid administrators must make “reasonable” decisions that support the intent of the provision. Your school is held accountable for all professional judgment decisions and for fully documenting each decision.

When considering using PJ, an FAA should keep in mind that an income protection allowance (IPA) is included in the EFC calculation to account for modest living expenses. Before adjusting for an unusual expense, consider whether it is already covered by the IPA. It is reasonable to assume that approximately 30% of the IPA is for food, 22% for housing, 9% for transportation expenses, 16% for clothing and personal care, 11% for medical care, and 12% for other family consumption. The income protection allowance is one of the intermediate values in the FAA Information section of the output document (labeled as “IPA”). See *Chapter 3* for the IPA values and how they impact the student’s EFC calculation.

If you use professional judgment to adjust a data element, you must use the resulting EFC consistently for all FSA funds awarded to that student. For example, if for awarding the student’s Pell Grant you adjust a data element that affects the EFC, that new EFC must also be used to determine the student’s eligibility for aid from the Campus-Based and Direct Loan programs.

**If you make a PJ adjustment, you must set the FAA Adjustment flag in FAA Access to CPS Online or via the Electronic Data Exchange (EDE).**

The Department is aware that the use of prior-prior year income data on the FAFSA form may make it more likely for PJs to apply. Schools should follow the guidelines presented here and be aware that while they may identify a category of students with similar circumstances to consider for a possible professional judgment adjustment (e.g., students who quit jobs to start school), they may not, however, automatically provide identical treatment to all students in that category. Each PJ case must be determined and documented individually.

Also, remember if you exercise PJ for a student who was selected for verification (by you or the Department), you must complete verification first. This is to ensure that you have correct information before considering a PJ adjustment. You may, however, complete verification and then make the PJ adjustment on the same transaction. *However, you do not have to verify information that you will entirely remove due to PJ.* For example, if a dependent student’s parents have separated after completion of the FAFSA form and one parent is no longer in the household size and you decide to use PJ to remove that parent’s income from the FAFSA form, you do not have to first verify his or her income. **Also, using PJ does not require you to verify a student’s application if he or she was not already selected for verification by the Department or your school.**

Finally, it has been determined that a school is not permitted to make a professional judgement for a student after that student has ceased to be eligible. This approach is consistent with applicable statute (HEA Sec. 479A(a)), which frames the authority for FAAs to make professional judgements on a case-by-case basis to the cost of attendance or the values of the data items required to calculate the expected student or parent contribution (or both) as being extended to “allow for treatment of an individual eligible applicant with special circumstances.” At the point where a student is no longer enrolled and ceases to be an eligible student for purposes of that enrollment, he or she is no longer considered an eligible applicant.

The [verification page on the FSA Assessments site](#) has guidance to help you review your PJ and dependency override procedures; see Activity 2.

**PJ examples**

**Example 1:** Kitty’s mother had income earned from work of \$25,000 in 2020 but is no longer employed. After receiving documentation confirming this, the FAA at Krieger College decides to adjust the AGI reported for Kitty’s parents to take into account their reduced income. The FAA also reduces the income earned from work for Kitty’s mother to zero.

**Example 2:** In 2020 Alan had \$3,550 in medical expenses that were out-of-pocket costs. He is married, has two children, and is the only member of his household in college, so his IPA is \$41,420. Because his expenses were less than the amount for medical expenses already provided for in the IPA (11% of \$41,420 is \$4,556), the aid administrator at Sarven Technical Institute does not adjust Alan’s FAFSA form.

Reminder

Under [GEN-21-02](#), the Department reminded financial aid administrators of their ability to exercise documented professional judgment when determining eligibility of students for federal student aid and encouraged aid administrators to consider the special circumstances that may arise for students and families during the ongoing *COVID-19 pandemic*, especially as they relate to unemployment or reduction in work.

### *Entire text of the HEA section on PJ*

HEA Sec. 479A(a) IN GENERAL—Nothing in this part shall be interpreted as limiting the authority of the financial aid administrator, on the basis of adequate documentation, to make adjustments on a case-by-case basis to the cost of attendance or the values of the data items required to calculate the expected student or parent contribution (or both) to allow for treatment of an individual eligible applicant with special circumstances.

However, this authority shall not be construed to permit aid administrators to deviate from the contributions expected in the absence of special circumstances. Special circumstances may include:

- tuition expenses at an elementary or secondary school;
- medical, dental, or nursing home expenses not covered by insurance;
- unusually high child care or dependent care costs;
- recent unemployment of a family member or an independent student;
- a student or family member who is a dislocated worker (as defined in section 101 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998);
- the number of parents enrolled at least half time in a degree, certificate, or other program leading to a recognized educational credential at an institution with a program participation agreement under section 487;
- a change in housing status that results in an individual being homeless (as defined in section 103 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act); or
- other changes in a family's income, a family's assets or a student's status.

Special circumstances shall be conditions that differentiate an individual student from a class of students rather than conditions that exist across a class of students. Adequate documentation for such adjustments shall substantiate such special circumstances of individual students.

In addition, nothing in this title shall be interpreted as limiting the authority of the student financial aid administrator in such cases:

1. to request and use supplementary information about the financial status or personal circumstances of eligible applicants in selecting recipients and determining the amount of awards under this title, or
2. to offer a dependent student financial assistance under section 428H or a Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan without requiring the parents of such student to file the financial aid form prescribed under section 483 if the student financial aid administrator verifies that the parent or parents of such student have ended financial support of such student and refuse to file such form.

No student or parent shall be charged a fee for collecting, processing, or delivering such supplementary information.

### *Dependent students without parent support*

Dependent students whose parents refuse to support them are not eligible for a dependency override, but they may be able to receive dependent level unsubsidized Direct Loans only. For a student to be eligible for this provision (the text of which is in the preceding section), you must get documentation (1) that his or her parents refuse to complete the FAFSA and (2) that they do not and will not provide any financial support to him or her (include the date support ended). If the parents refuse to sign and date a statement to this effect, you must get documentation from a third party (the student is not sufficient), such as a teacher, counselor, cleric, or court.

As noted in the next section, this situation does not justify a dependency override. But as with overrides, resolving the

situation is at your discretion. If you decide that a student falls into this category, you must document your decision and ensure that the student submits a FAFSA form and passes all the eligibility matches. The result will be a rejected application with no EFC. You can then award the student unsubsidized Direct Loans up to the maximum the student would normally be eligible for depending on his or her grade level (but not the amount a student can get when his or her parent is unable to get a PLUS loan). See DCL [GEN-08-12](#) for more information.

## *Refusing or reducing a loan*

Remember that the discretion of FAAs extends to refusing or reducing Direct Loan funds as long as the reason is documented and retained in the student's file, the determination is done on a case-by-case basis, given in writing to the student, and not due to discrimination against him or her on the basis of race, national origin, religion, sex, income, age, or disability.

### Refusing or reducing a loan

34 CFR 685.301(a)(8)

## Dependency Overrides

An FAA may conduct dependency overrides on a **case-by-case** basis for students with unusual circumstances. If the FAA determines that an override is appropriate, he or she must maintain the determination with any supporting documentation. **However, none of the conditions listed below, singly or in combination, qualify as unusual circumstances meriting a dependency override:**

1. Parents refuse to contribute to the student's education.
2. Parents will not provide information for the FAFSA or verification.
3. Parents do not claim the student as a dependent for income tax purposes.
4. Student demonstrates total self-sufficiency.

### Dependency overrides

HEA Sec. 480(d)(1)(I) and (d)(2). Also see Dear Colleague Letters GEN-03-07 and GEN-11-15.

**Unusual circumstances do include** (and may cause any of the aforementioned conditions) parent abandonment, an abusive family environment that threatens the student's health or safety, or the student being unable to locate his parents. In such cases an override might be warranted.

These conditions would also not disqualify a student from being a homeless unaccompanied youth or self-supporting and at risk of homelessness.

An aid administrator may override only from dependent to independent (though as suggested earlier, if an independent student receives substantial support from others, a school may use PJ to adjust the COA or FAFSA data items such as untaxed income).

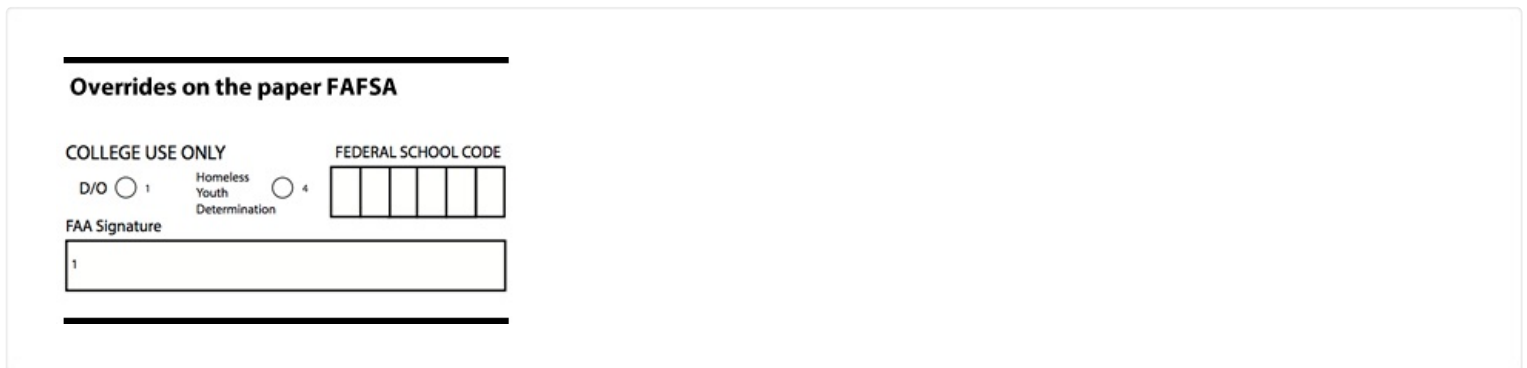
Documentation is critical—it must support, and include the reason for, the decision and should in almost all cases originate from a third party with knowledge of the unusual circumstances of the student.

An FAA may, without gathering documentation, use an override that another school granted in the same award year. However, overrides do not carry over from one year to the next; the FAA must reaffirm each year that the unusual circumstances persist and an override is still justified.

A third party that knows the student’s situation—e.g., a teacher, counselor, medical authority, member of the clergy, prison administrator, government agency, or court—should establish the unusual circumstances. Evidence can be a signed letter or an official document, such as a court order. If third party documentation is not available, the school may (it is not required to) accept a signed and dated statement from the student or a family member detailing the unusual circumstances. Such a statement should be a last resort.

To override the student’s dependent status on an initial application through FAA Access to CPS Online, the FAA should use the Dependency Override code of “1” (see the *EDE Technical Reference* for more information).

To authorize a dependency override on a paper FAFSA form, the FAA marks the bubble for an override, labeled “D/O,” in the “College Use Only” area, fills in the school’s federal code, and signs. A separate letter attached to the application in lieu of making the override is **not** acceptable.



The diagram shows a section of a FAFSA form titled "Overrides on the paper FAFSA". It is divided into two main areas: "COLLEGE USE ONLY" and "FEDERAL SCHOOL CODE". Under "COLLEGE USE ONLY", there are two radio button options: "D/O" with a bubble containing the number "1", and "Homeless Youth Determination" with a bubble containing the number "4". Below these options is a line labeled "FAA Signature" with a rectangular box containing the number "1". To the right of the signature line is a grid of seven empty boxes for the "FEDERAL SCHOOL CODE".

If the student has already applied, you can use FAA Access to authorize or cancel an override; overrides cannot be done on the SAR. If he or she had an override done at another school in the current year, that will be noted with the school’s federal code on FAA Access. Only the school performing the override will receive that transaction. If the student adds your school to the transaction or if he or she gives you his or her data release number (DRN), you can access the record.

**Override example:** Said is a refugee from Syria who qualifies for federal student aid as an eligible noncitizen. But his FAFSA form was rejected because he is a dependent student and did not provide data for his parents. When the aid administrator asks him for his parents’ information, he says they are in Syria and have been displaced due to the upheaval there, and he doesn’t know how to contact them. The FAA asks him for documentation of this, and Said says that he has an uncle living in the U.S. who can attest to his situation. The FAA asks for Said’s uncle to either appear in person and sign a statement confirming Said’s account or to send the aid office a notarized statement. Said’s uncle, who works not far from the school, comes to the aid office, signs the statement, and the FAA grants Said a dependency override.

### *Unable to provide parent data*

Students can indicate in the online FAFSA that they believe they have special circumstances that prevent them from providing parental data. Those who indicate this are thoroughly informed about what warrants a dependency override and what the results will be for their application. If they persist through those screens and do not include parental data, they will get a rejected ISIR with the special circumstances flag set. You will have to review such a student’s situation and determine if he or she: (1) is unaccompanied and homeless, (2) merits a dependency override, (3) must instead provide parental data, or (4) should be permitted to borrow only unsubsidized loans because he or she can document that his or her parents have refused to support him or her and to provide their information on his or her FAFSA.

### *Overrides and professional judgment*

The phrase “professional judgment” is loosely used for the discretion FAAs apply to dependency overrides and to data adjustments in the application. The provisions for these two types of changes are in separate places in the HEA. The citation for dependency overrides is Sec. 480(d)(1)(I); and is copied *in toto* earlier in this chapter under the section entitled “Entire text of the HEA section on PJ.

## Conflicting Information

In addition to reviewing application and data match information from the CPS, a school must have an adequate internal system to identify conflicting information—regardless of the source and regardless of whether the student is selected for verification—that would affect a student’s eligibility, such as information from the admissions office as to whether the student has a high school diploma or information from other offices regarding academic progress and enrollment status. The school must resolve all such conflicting information, except when the student dies during the award year or when he or she is no longer enrolled and will not re-enroll; if the student later enrolls, you are again obligated to resolve the conflicting information.

### Requirement to identify and resolve discrepant information

34 CFR 668.16(f)

If your school has conflicting information concerning a student’s eligibility or you have any reason to believe his or her application information is incorrect, you must resolve the discrepancies before disbursing FSA funds and, as with verification, before making any PJ adjustment. If you discover discrepancies *after* disbursing FSA funds, you must still reconcile the conflicting information and take appropriate action under the specific program requirements (depending on the outcome, funds may have to be returned).

### Requirement to verify questionable data

34 CFR 668.54(a)(2) “If an institution has reason to believe that an applicant’s FAFSA information is inaccurate, it must verify the accuracy of that information.”

## *Subsequent ISIRs*

*You are generally required to review all subsequent transactions for a student for the entire processing year even if you verified an earlier transaction.* An exception to this requirement is if a later transaction comes in after the student is no longer enrolled at your institution. First determine if the EFC or the C flag has changed or if there are new comments or NSLDS information that impacts eligibility for aid. Also, check any updates or corrections or whether the verification tracking group has changed. If the EFC has not changed and there are no changes in the C flag, tracking group, or NSLDS information, no action is generally required. If the EFC does change but it either doesn’t affect the amount and type of aid received or the data elements that changed were already verified, no action is required. But if the EFC changes and the pertinent data elements were not verified, then you must investigate. Of course, any time the C flag changes or NSLDS data have been modified, you must resolve any conflicts.

## *Discrepant tax data*

Financial aid administrators do not need to be tax experts, yet there are some issues that even a layperson with basic tax law information can evaluate. Because conflicting data often involve such information, FAAs must have a fundamental understanding of relevant tax issues that can considerably affect the need analysis. You are obligated to know (1) whether a person was required to file a tax return and (2) what the correct filing status for a person should be. The IRS’s online [Interactive Tax Assistant](#) is a useful tool that can help with these and other issues by walking the user through a series of questions.

Publication 17 of the IRS, [Your Federal Income Tax \(2020\)](#), is a useful resource. It addresses pertinent tax issues: the filing requirements—i.e., who is required to file a return—are on pages 5–9 of the PDF version and the filing status requirements are on pages 20–25.

For example, an FAA who notices that a dependent student’s parents, who are married and live together, have each filed as head of household (which offers a greater tax deduction than filing as single or married) must ask if that is the right status. Publication 17 explains on pages 23–25 the criteria a person must meet to file as head of household. Resolution of the conflict could be the parents refiling and submitting a copy of the amended return or a reasonable explanation of why there really is no conflict under IRS rules.

### *Marital and tax filing status*

The ISIR/SAR comment codes 361–368 indicate a possible error when the filing status and marital status do not match. This is not considered to be conflicting information subject to the resolution requirements of 34 CFR 668.16(f), but we do encourage schools to review the application for mistakes when these comments appear. Note that the FAFSA’s use of prior prior year tax data can increase the number of these comment codes. See the [2022-2023 SAR Comment Codes and Text Guide](#) for more information.

### *Resolution of conflicting information*

You may not disburse aid until you have resolved conflicting information, which you must do for any student as long as he or she is at your school. Even if the conflict concerns a previous award year, you must still investigate it. You have resolved the matter when you have determined which data are correct; this might simply be confirming that an earlier determination was the right one. Of course, you must document your findings and include an explanation that justifies your decision.

The [verification page on the FSA Assessments site](#) has guidance to help you review your conflicting information procedures; see Activity 1.

## **Referral of Fraud Cases**

If you suspect that a student, employee, or other individual has misreported information or altered documentation to fraudulently obtain federal funds, you must report your suspicions and provide any evidence to the Office of Inspector General (OIG). See also *Volume 2*.

### *OIG Address and Phone Numbers*

#### **National Hotline**

Inspector General’s Hotline Office of Inspector General U.S. Department of Education 400 Maryland Avenue, SW Washington, DC 20202-1500

Fax: (202) 245-7047

1-800-MIS-USED (1-800-647-8733) Hours: M, W 9–11 a.m. T, Th 1–3 p.m.

To submit a complaint online at any time, go to <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oig/hotline.html> and click on the appropriate link.

<b>Regional Offices</b>	<b>Telephone No.</b>
Boston, MA	617-289-0174
New York, NY	646-428-3861
Philadelphia, PA	215-656-6900

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Pittsburgh, PA	412-395-4528
Atlanta, GA	404-974-9430
Pembroke Pines, FL	954-450-7346
Chicago, IL	312-730-1630
Dallas, TX	214-661-9530
Ann Arbor, MI	734-330-2059
Denver, CO	303-844-0058
Nashville, TN	615-736-2205
Kansas City, MO	816-268-0500
Long Beach, CA	562-980-4141
Phoenix, AZ	602-507-6180
San Juan, PR	787-773-2746
Washington, DC	202-245-8467

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## OIG referrals

34 CFR 668.16(g)

### *Reporting Fraud Rings (Distance Education)*

The OIG fraud ring email address has been disabled and is no longer in use. Institutions now submit fraud ring complaints through the Department's OIG encrypted complaint web portal at the URL address <https://oighotlineportal.ed.gov>. Because the portal is encrypted, institutions no longer need to encrypt submitted documents.

In addition, institutions will submit a Fraud Ring Reporting Spreadsheet through the IG's compliant process. For more information on how to report fraud rings or for a copy of the Fraud Ring Reporting Spreadsheet, please review the [August 21, 2020 electronic announcement](#).



## FSA Feedback Center

Through the [FSA Feedback Center](#), students, parents, and others can submit to the Department the following feedback:

- compliments about a positive experience they have had with the Department, a school, or a federal loan servicer;
- allegations of suspicious activity by a school or person that might have violated federal laws regarding federal student aid; or
- complaints about
  - applying for and receiving federal loans, grants, and work study;
  - experiences with federal loan servicers, collection agencies, or the Department; and
  - schools—their administration of the FSA programs, marketing and recruitment practices, or misrepresentations of facts.

## Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

If a student does not have and cannot get documentation from any of the authorities listed under the “Unaccompanied homeless youth” section in Chapter 2 , you (the FAA) must determine if he or she is an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or is self-supporting and at risk of being homeless. Any student who is not yet 24 may qualify for a homeless youth determination. It is important to make homeless youth determinations on a case-by-case basis.

### Homeless youth determinations

DCL GEN-15-16

As defined later, a student is considered homeless if he or she lacks fixed, regular, and adequate housing. This is broader than just living “on the street.” It includes living

- with other people temporarily because he or she had nowhere else to go;
- in substandard housing (if it doesn’t meet local building codes or the utilities are turned off, it is generally not adequate);
- in emergency or transitional shelters, for example, trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency after disasters;
- in motels, campgrounds, cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, or any public or private place not designed for humans to live in; and
- in the school dormitory if the student would otherwise be homeless.

A student living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent may be considered homeless even if the parent would provide support and a place to live.

The documentation for an FAA’s evaluation of the living arrangements of a student must demonstrate that he or she meets the definition of this category of independent student. The determination may be based on a documented interview with the student if there is no written documentation available.

When you are making a determination of homelessness:

- Ask for help from local school district homeless liaisons, state homeless education coordinators, the National Center for Homeless Education <https://nche.ed.gov/>, or the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth [www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org).
- Use school district homeless liaisons and shelter providers to help develop and implement procedures for verification.
- Remember that relevant information can come from recognized third-parties such as private or publicly funded homeless shelters and service providers, financial aid administrators from another college, college access programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP, college or high school counselors, other mental health professionals, social workers,

mentors, doctors, and clergy.

- Use discretion when gathering information, and respect the student’s privacy. Some information, such as that protected by doctor-patient privilege, is confidential. Also, documents such as police or Child Protective Services reports are not necessary. *Don’t focus on why the student is homeless or unaccompanied but on whether the evidence shows he or she is an unaccompanied homeless youth* as defined in section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
- Determine eligibility based on the legal definitions provided.
- Recall that unaccompanied homeless youth may use the address of your school as their own on the FAFSA form.

## McKinney-Vento Act

42 U.S.C. 11434a

For students you determine to be unaccompanied homeless youths or unaccompanied, self-supporting youths at risk of being homeless, select the homeless youth determination option (#4) in the dependency override field in FAA Access to CPS Online or EDE. On the paper FAFSA, fill in the relevant bubble in the “College Use Only” box (see the graphic under the “Dependency Overrides” section earlier in this chapter), include your school code, and sign. For students who have already filed their FAFSA form submit a FAFSA correction using the Homeless Youth Determination flag on the “dependency determination” page (Special Circumstances flag on the ISIR). To cancel a homeless youth determination, you use the same method as when canceling a dependency override: change the dependency override value to “2—FAA override canceled” in FAA Access or EDE.

You may rely on a determination by another school that a student was in this category on or after July 1, 2021. *Also, a new determination must be made each year for an applicant who is homeless or at risk of being homeless.*

### *Confirmation not required*

You are not required to confirm the answers to the homeless youth questions unless you have conflicting information. A documented phone call with, or a written statement from, one of the relevant authorities is sufficient verification when needed.

In most cases the officials authorized to make an unaccompanied homeless youth determination (those listed under the “Unaccompanied homeless youth” section in Chapter 2) will only provide documentation of that status for persons they are directly providing services to. However, there may be a few case-by-case instances where such an official will provide documentation for a person who is no longer officially receiving services. Also, local liaisons may write subsequent-year letters of verification for unaccompanied homeless youth through age 23 for whom they have the necessary information to write such letters. This documentation is acceptable for verifying unaccompanied homelessness.

It is not conflicting information if you disagree with an authority’s determination that a student is homeless. If you believe the authority is incorrect or abusing the process, accept his or her determination but contact the following oversight party, as relevant, to evaluate the authority’s determinations:

- School district homeless liaison: contact the coordinator of education for homeless children and youth programs of the state’s educational agency. You can find state coordinator contact information at <https://nche.ed.gov/data/>.
- Director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program: you should contact the local Continuum of Care (CoC) administering the HUD homeless assistance program. Go to <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/> and click on “Contact a CoC” on the right side of the page.
- Director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program: contact the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth by phone at 301-608-8098 or by email at [ncfy@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:ncfy@acf.hhs.gov).

## Homeless youth definitions

**At risk of being homeless**—when a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing

**Homeless**—lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing

**Self-supporting**—when a student pays for his or her own living expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing

**Unaccompanied**—when a student is not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian

## **Housing**

**Fixed**—stationary, permanent, and not subject to change

**Regular**—used on a predictable, routine, or consistent basis

**Adequate**—sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in the home