



Policy Bulletin: Federal Financial Aid

Congress passes legislation to simplify the financial aid process!

In this year's appropriations act, Congress has passed legislation that will greatly simplify the financial aid application process by 2023, with specific benefits for youth with prior involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Changes include:

- **Shortening and simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).** Filling out the FAFSA can be very intimidating for all students, but can be particularly difficult for youth in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, who may not have easy access to financial aid professionals to help them. These changes will make it easier for youth and supportive adults to complete the application.
- **Removing the requirement that students register for selective service in order to get financial aid.** This can be a barrier for older students who were in foster care or the juvenile justice system during their high school years, which can lead to students not knowing that they have to sign up for selective service.
- **Fighting misconceptions about youth eligibility for the Pell Grant.** After many years of work by criminal justice advocates, adults who are incarcerated will once again be eligible to receive financial aid! While youth in the juvenile justice system have always retained eligibility for federal financial aid, it's easy for people to get confused about the difference between the adult and juvenile systems. This change should help fight misconceptions about aid eligibility for youth in the juvenile justice system, as well as benefit adults in the criminal justice system, including those who have prior involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice.
- **Allowing financial aid officers to accept a wide range of documentation, including phone calls from agencies, attorneys, CASAs, and others, for foster youth, unaccompanied homeless youth, or other independent student status.** Youth who are deemed independent students can fill out the FAFSA without parental information, and may qualify for more financial aid. In the past, the process for becoming an "independent student" has been difficult, and can vary from college to college. Changes in this legislation will make it easier for students to qualify as independent, and will prevent students from having to reapply for independent status every year.
- **Linkages with benefits programs.** This legislation will require the FAFSA to coordinate more with federal benefits programs to ensure that eligible youth and families apply for available support. Increasing knowledge of available support services, as well as increasing outreach by benefits programs, can help youth access much-needed funds for food, healthcare, or other needs.