



Policy Number:	SSA/CW #26-14
Policy Title:	Education Training Voucher and Tuition Waiver Policy
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Approved By:	Dr. Alger M. Studstill, Jr.  Executive Director Social Services Administration
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Supersedes:	SSA/CW #18-18 Maryland Tuition Waiver and Education Training Voucher
Originating Office:	Office of Child and Family Well-being Out-of-Home Care: dlolderyouthpermanency_dhs@maryland.gov
Summary of Change:	This policy reflects the passage of bill HB982/SB864, effective July 1, 2026, that lowered the eligibility age for the tuition waiver from age 13 to 8. This policy also includes updates to the ETV vendor information and application process.
Required Actions:	Local Departments of Social Services must ensure in-home and out-of-home staff are aware of these policy changes and must share this information with potentially eligible youth and their families.
Key Words:	Tuition Waiver, Education and Training Voucher, Free Application for Federal Student Aid, Foster Success
Related Federal Law	42 U.S.C. § 677 ;
Related State Laws	Md. Ann. Code, Education Article § 15-106.1 ,
COMAR	COMAR 07.02.11.12.K-L
State Plan Implications?	No

Purpose And Summary

This policy provides updated guidance to assist each Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) in supporting current and former foster care youth in accessing the Maryland Tuition Waiver and the Education Training Voucher (ETV). Ensure that foster care youth are aware of the Maryland Tuition Waiver and ETV programs, and recent changes to eligibility criteria. The department should ensure that foster care youth who are eligible for the Maryland Tuition Waiver and/or ETV apply to these programs to avoid unnecessary debt from the cost of postsecondary education.

Related Laws And Regulations

This policy is being reissued to comply with amendments to § 15-106.1 of the Maryland Education Article regarding the Maryland Tuition Waiver. Eligible foster care youth are exempt from paying tuition at Maryland public institutions of higher education if they enroll before age 25, are pursuing a vocational certificate, associate's, or bachelor's degree, and apply for federal and State financial aid. Eligibility was expanded to include individuals who were in out-of-home placement on or after their 8th birthday for at least one year and later entered guardianship, were adopted, or reunified with a parent, as well as certain younger siblings adopted or placed in guardianship with the same family. Youth who were in out-of-home placement on their 18th birthday or at high school graduation/General Education Development (GED) completion may also qualify. The waiver may be used for up to 10 years after initial enrollment or until a bachelor's degree is earned, whichever occurs first.

The Education and Training Voucher Program, administered by the federal government, was established to support individuals who have experienced foster care. The federal government makes funds available for post-secondary educational opportunities through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood ([42 USC. § 677](#)). Eligible individuals may receive funding for qualified educational expenses for a total of 5 years, as long as they are continuously enrolled in a post-secondary institution and making satisfactory progress toward completion of the program.

Definitions

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) - is the official form used by college-bound and current students to apply for federal financial assistance and is administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

Qualified Education Expenses - means ETV funds are available for tuition and school fees (not at a public Maryland institution if waived under the Maryland Tuition Waiver), room and board, off-campus housing, books, required materials and supplies, childcare, tutoring, and transportation necessary for the student to attend school.

Tuition - means the charges imposed by a public institution of higher education for enrollment at the institution. Tuition includes registration charges and all fees required as a condition of enrollment in credit-bearing and noncredit courses offered during the fall, winter, spring, or summer term.

Vocational certificate - means a certificate or license awarded by a public institution of higher education on completion of a course of study that prepares an individual to work in a career field by taking credit-bearing courses or noncredit courses.

Procedures And Timeframes

Tuition Waiver

1. *Eligibility Criteria:* To be eligible for the Maryland Tuition Waiver, an individual must have:
 - 1.1. Been placed in out-of-home placement by the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS); and
 - 1.1.1. Individuals who were placed out of the State are eligible for the Maryland Tuition Waiver.
 - 1.2. Resided in an out-of-home placement on the individual's 18th birthday or at the time of graduation from high school or upon successful completion of the GED examination; OR
 - 1.3. Resided in an out-of-home placement for at least one year on or after the individual's 8th birthday and entered into guardianship, been adopted, or reunited with at least one of the individual's parents;
 - 1.4. Be the younger sibling of an individual who met the qualifications outlined in section (1.1) and (1.3) above, and was concurrently placed into the same guardianship by the same parent, or was adopted by the same adoptive family with the older sibling.
 - 1.5. Is enrolled at the institution on or before the age of 25 years;
 - 1.6. Is enrolled as a candidate for a vocational certificate, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree;
2. *Individual Responsibilities*
 - 2.1. To receive the Tuition Waiver, eligible individuals need to complete the FAFSA each year.
 - 2.2. The application is available at www.fafsa.gov.
 - 2.3. Applicants should accurately respond to the FAFSA question asking whether both parents are deceased, whether, after reaching age 8, they were ever in foster care, or whether they were ever wards of the court.
 - 2.4. If they are able to respond "yes" to this question, applicants should not be required to submit certain "family income" verification information, and can qualify as independent

students.

- 2.5. To receive the Tuition Waiver, eligible individuals must complete the Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA) each year. Individuals who are not legal residents of the United States cannot complete the FAFSA, but they can complete the MSFAA.

- 2.5.1. To complete the MSFAA, go to

- <https://mhec.maryland.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

- 2.6. The individual must be accepted to a public Maryland institution of higher education, for credit or non-credit coursework, including certificate vocational programs, for the Tuition Waiver to be applied. The individual must inform their financial aid office of their eligibility for the tuition waiver.

3. *Responsibilities of the LDSS*

- 3.1. On behalf of the youth applicant currently in the custody of the LDSS:

- 3.2. Ensure that all staff, including both out-of-home and in-home, are knowledgeable about:

- 3.2.1. The Maryland Tuition Waiver Program;

- 3.2.2. The new eligibility requirements outlined above, and

- 3.2.3. The process to activate a waiver after acceptance to a public college or university in Maryland.

- 3.3. Ensure the eligible youth has an out-of-home program assignment in the electronic system of record upon entry into out-of-home placement.

- 3.4. Ensure the youth has the financial aid office (at the school they are attending) contact information to seek the tuition waiver.

- 3.5. Assist the youth with contacting the financial aid office to notify them of their eligibility for the Maryland tuition waiver, and for the school to activate the waiver in the student account based on the tuition waiver list provided by the state.

- 3.6. The case worker or placement provider is to contact DHS/Social Services Administration (SSA) Emerging Adults Program Manager at dlolderyouthpermanency_dhs@maryland.gov if the financial aid office requests additional verification or does not grant the youth a tuition waiver.

- 3.7. Coordinate with the youth to review scholarships and grants awarded by Federal and State Aid.

- 3.8. Scholarships and grants must be accepted by the youth for them to be applied. This is done through the Maryland state financial aid system.

- 3.9. If the college or university requests verification that the youth was in foster care for federal financial aid, a Foster Care Verification Form should be completed and provided to the youth.

- 3.10. Regularly support youth in reviewing their student account to

ensure there is no balance on their account for tuition and fees.

4. *Responsibilities of SSA*

- 4.1. SSA must send the Maryland Tuition Waiver list of eligible individuals to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) in January and July of each year.
- 4.2. The list is generated by SSA using the Child, Juvenile, and Adult Management System (CJAMS).
- 4.3. The list includes instructions, including the contact information for the SSA Emerging Adults Program Manager, for public Maryland universities and colleges on how to use the list, what to do for eligible students, and what to do if students who request the tuition waiver are not on the list.
- 4.4. For individuals not on the list, institutions are instructed to contact the SSA Emerging Adults Program Manager to verify the student's eligibility.
- 4.5. The SSA Emerging Adults Program Manager will reference CJAMS to ensure the youth is eligible for the Maryland Tuition Waiver.
- 4.6. If a student is found eligible, the SSA Emerging Adults Program Manager will issue an eligibility letter confirming the student's eligibility for the Maryland Tuition Waiver.
- 4.7. The eligibility letter will be provided to the appropriate financial aid office at the Maryland public university or college, and a copy will be provided to the LDSS Independent Living Coordinator for dissemination to the individual in care, the case manager, and the resource/foster parent.

Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)

LDSS staff must ensure that foster care recipients, prospective guardians/adoptive parents, and placement providers are aware of the ETV program and the eligibility requirements. LDSS staff are to assist individuals with accessing ETV and to ensure that ETV is included as an available resource as part of a youth's education transition planning. Eligible individuals may qualify for both the MD Tuition Waiver and the MD ETV program, depending on their enrollment location. If an individual receiving the MD Tuition Waiver at a Maryland public institution also receives ETV, those funds cannot be used for tuition. Individuals who are not citizens or legal residents of the United States and cannot complete the FAFSA cannot use ETV until they become legal residents.

5. *Eligibility for ETV*

- 5.1. Individuals are eligible for ETV if they were placed in an out-of-home placement by the Maryland DHS when they were 14 years of age or older and:

- 5.2. Were adopted or entered into kinship guardianship at 16 years of age or older; or
- 5.3. Were in an out-of-home placement on their 18th birthday.
- 5.4. Individuals who were placed out of the State are eligible for the ETV.
- 5.5. Qualified individuals must have completed high school or a GED and be enrolled at a college, university, or an accredited vocational program.
- 5.6. Must be a U.S. Citizen or qualified non-citizen.
- 5.7. Youth must initially apply for ETV funds before the age of 21.
- 5.8. Access is limited to no more than five years total, which may be consecutive or non-consecutive.

6. *ETV Funds*

ETV funds for full-time students can be up to \$5000 per federal fiscal year for college and accredited training programs. Part-time students may receive no more than \$2500 based on a student's need.

Funds can be applied towards:

- 6.1. Tuition and school fees (at non-public or out-of-state institutions);
- 6.2. Room and board;
- 6.3. Off-campus housing;
- 6.4. Books;
- 6.5. Rental or purchase of required equipment, materials, and school supplies;
- 6.6. Childcare for a dependent;
- 6.7. Tutoring costs related to attendance in the educational program;
- 6.8. Transportation necessary for the student to attend school.

7. *Eligible Individual's Responsibilities*

- 7.1. Eligible individuals must complete and file the FAFSA on www.fafsa.gov.
- 7.2. Complete the ETV application for Foster Success online after July 1st, at <https://fseducation.fostersuccess.org/maryland-etv/>
- 7.3. If the individual is attending a non-public or out-of-state college, they will need to submit the "[Financial Aid Release Form](#)" with their application to their institution's financial aid office and request that the Financial Aid Office complete and submit it to Foster Success.
- 7.4. Individuals applying for funds after their first semester as freshmen must submit unofficial transcripts to receive funds the following semesters.
- 7.5. ETV recipients must maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA each term to continue to qualify for financial aid.
- 7.6. Youth who receive a GPA below a 2.0 for the following semester must be on an Academic Success Plan (ASP) and meet with the ETV Coordinator monthly to raise their GPA. If, by the end of that

- semester, their GPA is not above 2.0, they will lose ETV funding until they can provide a semester transcript with a GPA above 2.0.
- 7.7. Students must apply to the ETV program every year to remain eligible.
 - 7.8. Students are encouraged to maintain contact with the MD ETV coordinator at Foster Success regarding services and must submit the requested documents. Monthly contact with the MD ETV coordinator is incentivized.
8. *Responsibilities of the LDSS*
- 8.1. On behalf of the youth applicant currently in the custody of the LDSS:
 - 8.2. Ensure that all out-of-home staff are knowledgeable about the ETV application process.
 - 8.3. Provide support in maintaining a 2.0 per semester to ensure they remain eligible for ETV funds, and encourage the use of college academic support such as tutoring and office hours with their professor.
9. *Responsibilities of SSA*
- SSA directly coordinates with the ETV vendor to ensure disbursements of funds to pay off balances owed to any higher education institutions, and remaining funds are then disbursed to youth.
- 9.1. The SSA Education Specialist regularly reviews submitted applications to ensure youth meet eligibility requirements.
 - 9.2. Once applications are approved in the ETV vendor system, they are processed. Transcripts and financial aid forms are requested, and then disbursements are scheduled.
 - 9.3. The contract monitor regularly meets with the ETV vendor to discuss deliverables, barriers, and any issues with Maryland state colleges and universities that need to be addressed.

Documentation

If a tuition waiver eligibility letter is created for a youth in care, it should be uploaded into the documents section in the child welfare case record in the electronic system of record.

Forms And Attachments

[List of Maryland Public Institutions](#)

[Financial Aid Release Form \(ETV\)](#)

[Foster Care Verification Form](#)

Related Information

[HB982/SB864](#)

[Tuition Waiver Updates Flyer](#)

[Tuition Waiver Youth Friendly Flyer](#)

[Tuition Waiver FAQ](#)

[Youth Transition Planning Summary](#)