



PA Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver (FosterEd) Program

The FosterEd Program, created by Act 16 of 2019 and amended by Act 49 of 2019, mandates postsecondary institutions in the Commonwealth waive tuition and mandatory fees for youth who are or were in foster care.

This waiver applies only to charges that remain after all other gift aid (federal, state, and other scholarships or grants) have been applied to the student's account.

The program is being administered collaboratively by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) in conjunction with the PA departments of Education, Human Services, and Labor & Industry.

The point of contact for Jersey College is the Associate Vice President of Strategy and Effectiveness, who may be contacted at FosterEd@jerseycollege.edu.

For more information, including brochures and program applications, please visit <https://www.pheaa.org/schools-partners/postsecondary-schools/foster-education>.



The PA Fostering
Independence Tuition
Waiver (FosterEd) Program
provides tuition waivers at
postsecondary institutions
for eligible youth who are or
have been in foster care.

The PA Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program, created by Act 16 of 2019, seeks to remove barriers in accessing a postsecondary education for youth who are or have been in foster care. It helps eligible students complete a postsecondary degree with less debt and provides youth with a central point of contact for assistance and support.

The program is being administered by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) in conjunction with the PA Departments of Education, Human Services, and Labor & Industry.



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PA Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program

**Postsecondary Tuition Waiver
for Eligible Foster Care Youth**



Am I Eligible?

To be eligible for the tuition waiver, students must meet the following criteria:

- Be a Pennsylvania resident
- Have not reached age 26 by July 1 immediately prior to the upcoming academic year for which the FosterEd waiver is received
- Have graduated from high school or received a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma
- Be eligible for services under Pennsylvania's John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood
- Be identified as a youth in foster care or a youth discharged from foster care at age 16 or older OR exited foster care on or after age 16 to adoption or permanent legal custodianship
- Be enrolled as an undergraduate, at least half time in a postsecondary institution that is approved by the U.S. Department of Education for Title IV student assistance programs
- Have unmet cost for the Chafee Education and Training Grant (Chafee ETG) Program, as determined by the postsecondary institution
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress, as determined by the postsecondary institution
- Not be in default on a federal student loan

How to Participate

Eligible foster youth must take the following steps:

- **File a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)**
- **Submit a Chafee ETG Application by May 1**
- **Submit a PA State Grant Form, if applicable**
- **Enroll in an eligible PA postsecondary institution**

Visit PHEAA.org for additional information.



FAQs

What is a Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver?

An eligible student's remaining charges for tuition and mandatory fees are eliminated after all federal, state, and gift aid are applied.

Does the tuition waiver cover room and board?

No, the tuition waiver applies only to tuition and mandatory fees. It does not cover room and board.

Will the tuition waiver cover existing education debt?

No, the tuition waiver will only be applied to tuition and mandatory fees charged for the current academic year.

Do I need to fill out a specific application?

Yes, you must submit a FAFSA, Chafee ETG application for the current year, and a PA State Grant Form, if applicable, for the postsecondary institution to which you are applying. Your Point of Contact is able to assist in identifying further scholarship and grant opportunities.

How long does the tuition waiver apply?

The tuition waiver may be applied up to 5 academic years, defined as 10 semesters or the equivalent, whether or not consecutive, until age 26.

Is there anyone at my postsecondary institution who can help?

Each school has a Point of Contact available to support eligible students throughout their college careers with the following:

- Assistance in completing admissions and financial aid applications
- Obtaining verification of eligibility
- Providing referrals for on- and off-campus resources and support services

For additional information visit
PHEAA.org/FosterEd

Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program Point of Contact FAQs

General Information

Q. What is the Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program?

- A.** This program was established to assist Pennsylvania youth who are or have been in foster care with the financial challenges of accessing higher education. The program offers students up to the age of 26 a tuition waiver for undergraduate studies at most colleges and universities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Q. What does a waiver mean?

- A.** A waiver means that the remaining balance of the student's tuition and mandatory fees, after all federal and state grants and outside scholarships have been applied, will be eliminated or paid for by the institution.

Q. For how many terms and for what terms can a student receive a waiver?

- A.** A student may receive a waiver for up to 5 years, which is equal to ten semesters or the equivalent (this is adjusted accordingly for quarter schools). The waiver can apply to all terms: fall, winter, spring, or summer.

Q. If a student has already covered the term balance before receiving notice of FosterEd eligibility, how should my school proceed?

- A.** If a student has already covered the term balance via alternate means (e.g., out of pocket, loans, etc.), then the school must refund any money received from the student for tuition and mandatory fees within 30 days of receipt of the student's name on the Waiver Listing. The student remains responsible for room, board, and non-mandatory fees.

Q. What fees are deemed mandatory?

- A.** Mandatory fees are defined as either charges that are typically assessed to all students at the beginning of a term or fees that are required as a part of a student's academic program or credential completion. For a list of mandatory fees, please see the Waiver Certification section of the FosterEd Program Guidelines.

Q. We are not a state school or a state-related school. Are we required to waive the student's remaining balance?

- A.** Postsecondary institutions in Pennsylvania approved by the U.S. Department of Education for Title IV funding must provide the waiver to all eligible students. The legislation governing this program is very specific regarding the postsecondary institutions that must participate. We recommend that you consult your legal department if you have questions surrounding your institution's participation.

Point of Contact (POC)

Q. Is the POC required to have any specific training or background?

- A.** No, the POC is not required to have any specific training. Given the responsibilities, the POC should be knowledgeable about financial aid and admissions processes, available resources and referrals at the institution, and external resources or offices, as listed below.

Q. Are any resources or trainings available for the POC?

- A. Yes, PHEAA is collaborating with stakeholders to conduct trainings and share additional resources. PHEAA training resources can be found on [PHEAA.org/training](https://pheaa.org/training).

Q. What verification of student eligibility is needed from the foster care system?

- A. The student's eligibility is typically verified by the County Children and Youth Agency or PA Department of Human Services as part of Chafee ETG application processing. The student may have eligibility documentation to share with the POC, but is not required to do so.

The student may self-identify to the POC at the institution and request assistance in confirming eligibility. The student could also be identified via a FosterEd Denial Listing from PHEAA as pending confirmation of eligibility. If so, legislation requires the POC to assist the student.

There are four possible sources of verification:

- A copy of a court order from the local Court of Common Pleas; or
- A statement (verbal or written) from the County of Placement Office (County Children and Youth Agency) or PA Department of Human Services (a list of County Children and Youth Agencies can be found on the [PA Department of Human Services Provider Directory](#)); or
- A statement from a private provider agency that delivers child welfare services; or
- A statement from an attorney, guardian ad litem, or court-appointed special advocate including verification of the person's relationship to the student.

The POC should document that eligibility was verified or the reason that eligibility was denied, including the source or office, and information should be shared with PHEAA.

Q. What type of services should be offered to students who identify themselves as eligible for the waiver program?

- A. Students known to be eligible or who self-identify as eligible for services under FosterEd should be offered assistance with the following:
- Completing the admission application and gathering required documents
 - Completing all applicable financial aid applications (e.g., FAFSA®, Chafee ETG, PA State Grant Form, etc.)
 - Identifying and applying for any other applicable scholarships or grants

Students should also be given information regarding on- or off-campus resources or services, including tutoring, academic advising, career, housing, medical insurance, and health and mental health counseling.

Students who were in foster care at age 14 or older are eligible to receive Independent Living (IL) aftercare services through the County Children and Youth Agencies up until their 23rd birthday. Students can be assisted with aftercare services by contacting their County Children and Youth Agency for services that can include assistance with housing, counseling, and other supports offered by their county.

Another resource is the website of the Center for Schools and Communities at pafostercare.org.

Student Eligibility

Q. How will I know that a student is eligible to receive a FosterEd waiver?

- A. PHEAA provides a FosterEd Waiver Listing biweekly to institutions' PageCenter mailboxes. As outlined above, the POC could be required to determine foster care eligibility. If the student appears on the Waiver Listing, it means PHEAA has already determined that the student meets foster care eligibility and several other requirements:
- Is a current resident of Pennsylvania
 - Has completed the current academic year's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)

- Has completed the PA Chafee Education and Training Grant (Chafee ETG) application
- Has graduated from high school or received a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma
- Has not reached the age of 26 by July 1st prior to the upcoming academic year
- Is not in default on a federal student loan or does not owe a refund on other Title IV aid

In addition to the FosterEd Waiver Listing, institutions will also receive Chafee ETG and FosterEd Denial Listings. The Denial Listings are to be used by the POC at the institution to identify and assist students in establishing eligibility for the FosterEd waiver; this may include determining the students' foster care eligibility, as outlined above.

Q. If PHEAA is checking the student's eligibility under PA's John H. Chafee Foster Care Program, why does the POC have responsibility for this?

- A. The legislation requires the POC to assist. If the student completes the FAFSA and the Chafee ETG application, PHEAA runs an eligibility check against available records and provides this verification when possible. In that case, the POC will not have to check eligibility. If foster care eligibility is not verified and the student appears on a Denial Listing for this reason, the POC must offer assistance.

Q. What does the student need to do to receive the waiver?

- A. The Student Eligibility Requirements section of the Program Guidelines and the [student page](#) at PHEAA.org outline these details. Students must meet eligibility criteria and complete the FAFSA and the Chafee ETG application for the current year. If the student received ETG funds in the 2019-20 Academic Year, a new Chafee ETG application is not required. Applications for Chafee ETG are available on [PHEAA.org/Chafee](#).

Q. If the student receives the waiver for the upcoming academic year, is the Chafee ETG application needed for the next academic year?

- A. No, the Chafee ETG application is not required, but all renewal students must submit the FAFSA each year to receive the waiver.

Q. What happens if a student drops down to less than half-time status?

- A. In the case of a student who drops to less than half-time status **before** charges are applied to the student's account, the student is no longer eligible for a waiver for that term.

If the student drops to less than half-time after the waiver has been applied, the waiver will remain in place. If the student's change results in adjustments to charges and financial aid, the amount of the waiver would be increased or decreased to cover all remaining charges.

Q. After a waiver has been applied, will an eligible student ever be required to repay a waiver due to withdrawal or loss of eligibility?

- A. No, a student will not be required to repay a waiver.

Q. Can a student be ineligible for Chafee ETG and still appear as eligible on a Waiver Listing?

- A. Depending on the ineligible reason for Chafee ETG, the student may still be eligible for the FosterEd waiver and appear on the FosterEd Waiver Listing. Please contact PHEAA staff for questions regarding specific student accounts.

Q. How will the institution know if a transfer student is eligible for the waiver?

- A. The student should notify PHEAA immediately of the intent to transfer. If the student is eligible, the student record will be updated to appear on the new institution's next Waiver Listing. The POC must work with the student to support the completion of all necessary processes for the transfer.

Q. For what costs can Chafee ETG funds be used?

- A.** Chafee ETG funds can be used toward all costs of attendance, including expenses such as room and board, books, computers, supplies, and transportation. Institutions may apply Chafee ETG funds toward these costs if the student is eligible for the FosterEd waiver.

Q. A student who wishes to attend my institution provided evidence of Chafee ETG eligibility, a key component in determining FosterEd eligibility, in advance of PHEAA confirming that eligibility. How should our institution proceed?

- A.** When verification of the student's foster care eligibility has been provided to the institution, the institution should proceed with conditional aid packaging or preliminary crediting of FosterEd benefits for the student's account towards tuition and mandatory fees. The POC also should ensure the student has applied for all federal and state aid for which the student is eligible.

Couldn't find your question?

Email FosterEd@pheaa.org or visit PHEAA.org for more information.