



Tuition Waiver Procedure Guide

Educate Tomorrow, in partnership with the Positive Pathways Program, developed this guide to support the processing of the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) tuition exemption (the waiver) for students from foster care.

The guidelines are based on information provided by twelve Florida public colleges and universities that are part of the Positive Pathways Network, which operates under the auspices of DCF.

This guide makes reference to:

- Foster care liaison: A campus-based staff person, sometimes called a “coach”, at your institution who is responsible for intra-campus communication regarding the waiver, processing the waiver accurately and coordinating student success support for the recipients. Throughout the guide, we refer to this person as the “foster care liaison”.
- Program: A program or initiative in place to support the academic progress of students using the waiver. We recognize that not most institutions have not established program dedicated to this population. Many institutions serve this population through other student success programs for vulnerable student populations.
- The waiver. The administration of the tuition and fee exemption occurs through the Tuition Exemption Form, often also referred to as a “waiver”.

How to Access the Waiver

To determine their eligibility for the tuition exemption, students or their advocates should contact the Community Based Care (CBC) foster care lead agency where their child welfare case was located. The student should request to speak with an eligibility specialist who will provide documentation relating to the student’s eligibility.

The Waiver remains valid until the student reaches 28 years of age. See [§ 1009.25\(1\)\(c\), \(d\), Fla. Stat.](#)

The DCF tuition and fee exemption can be used to waive the student’s application fee at all public post-secondary educational institutions in Florida.

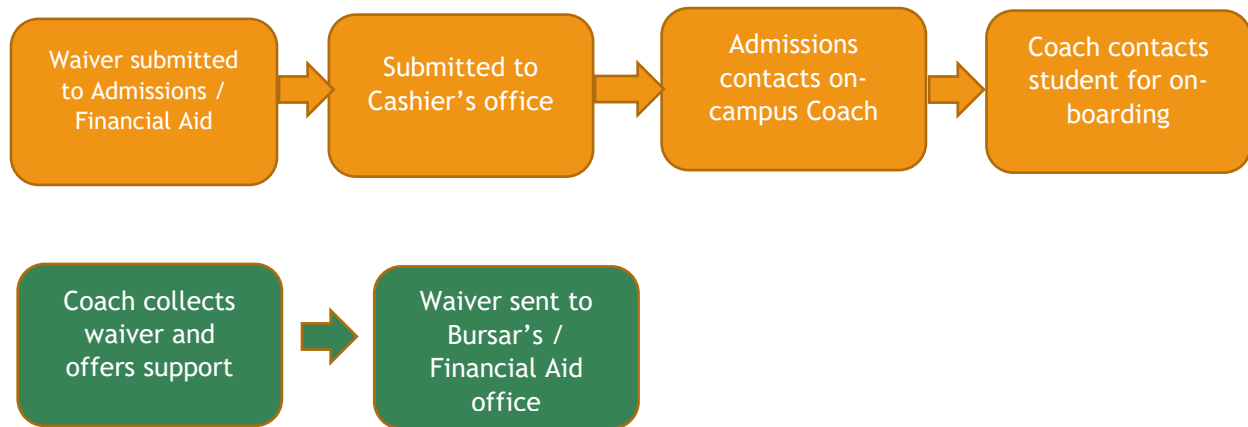
For questions regarding eligibility or how to obtain a tuition and fee exemption form, CF-FSP 5220, contact your local CBC, the Positive Pathways Program office (305-374-3751) or the

Florida Independent Living Resource Center, operated by Daniel Kids, at 1-844-ILYOUTH (844-459-6884). Additional information can be found:

<https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/independent-living/tuition-fee-exemption.shtml>

A copy of the form, for reference purposes only, can be found in the appendix.

Most Common Ways of Processing the Waiver



The following method has proven to be the most effective method to identify eligible students and process their exemptions.



How to Develop a Waiver Process at Your Institution

While every institution customizes and tailors the administration of the waiver to fit their staff, capacity and organizational structure, all institutions should incorporate the following four core elements for an effective process:

1. Identification of students
2. Collecting the waiver
3. Processing and posting credit to student's financial account
4. Outreach by foster care liaison to former foster youth

To effectively implement these four elements, your institution should use the following steps:

1. Identification

- a. Determine a method to identify students who are eligible for the DCF waiver.
 - i. If a student self-identifies, through the FAFSA, as someone who has been in DCF, he or she *may* be eligible for the waiver.
 - ii. An institution can then pull a report of these students and use it for follow-up.
 - iii. Financial aid can generate a report each semester of students that self-identified on the FAFSA and send the report to the foster care liaison, who can cross-check the information.
- b. If students do not disclose their status on the FAFSA, other methods for identifying these students include:
 - i. The admissions application can include a question asking if the applicant has spent time in foster care. The student's history or experience in DCF could also come up in conversations regarding residency during the admissions process.
 - ii. Other departments, staff member or students may refer former foster students to your institution's student success or foster youth program.
 - iii. Student initiated contact, upon learning about services that are available for this population.
- c. See Appendix B for a sample email to target students.

2. Waiver Collection & Verification

- a. Identify a central point of contact (the foster care liaison) and the department that will be responsible for collection and intake of waiver.
- b. Notification is given to the CBC agency to verify information. CBC administers the student's Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) stipend and ensures they are eligible for the waiver.
- c. While some institutions process the waiver through admissions as their first point of contact, it is recommended that the foster care liaison is the first point of contact for all students with the waiver in order to engage the student early on and provide necessary support, services and resources.

3. Processing the Waiver

- a. The foster care liaison submits the waiver to the financial aid/cashier office for billing purposes to ensure that the credit is posted to the student's financial account. Most financial aid offices prefer to receive the waiver from the foster care liaison not the student.
- b. The waiver typically must be submitted by the final registration deadline.
- c. Ideally, the waiver is entered into the system one time after verification.
- d. For returning students, it is also suggested to utilize the retention department or your institution's equivalent; the person in charge of retention will check for students that have unpaid balances. If the student account shows that they have used the DCF tuition waiver in the past, the foster care liaison is notified that their waiver hasn't been processed.

4. Outreach by Support Services personnel

- a. Once the foster care liaison is aware of students using the waiver, they reach out through phone or email and arrange to meet with them.
- b. The goal is for foster care liaisons to engage them as quickly as possible in the institution's student services programs or their dedicated former foster student program to provide support, ensure success and build community.

Cross-Campus Communication

A successful and efficient tuition waiver process requires educating by the foster care liaison to the various stakeholder departments on campus in order to create open communication. Once your process is established, the foster care liaison should communicate with and inform all departments that might interact with the waiver about your process, timelines and main contacts.

Depending on the hierarchy of your institution, examples of the various departments that might be involved with the Waiver process include:

- Bursar's office
- Housing office
- Cashier's office
- Registrar's office
- Financial Aid office
- New Student / Orientation office
- Student Services or other departments where the program may reside

Reviewing Your Process

Your institution should conduct an annual or periodic planning meeting to evaluate the process to determine what is working and what improvements as needed, as well as adjust for any changes that DCF may require.

Recommendations for Strengthening Your Efforts

1. Map out the flow and the process and show all the stakeholders that are involved; that is, everyone who will touch or should be aware of the waiver.
2. Create a communication piece that students can receive from student services or financial aid office (see Appendix B as a sample).
3. Create an ad or banner on your institution's student portal about your program.
4. Create systems internally so that the waiver is only collected once.
5. Hold an information session to connect your institution's foster student (or equivalent) program, student services and financial aid department and create a strong collaborative

relationship. Many institutions have found this to be the most successful method to establishing the reputation of the foster care liaison.

6. Have the foster care liaison attend relevant departmental staff meetings to provide an overview of the waiver, program and their role.
7. Develop a strong relationship with your local DCF CBC.
8. Develop community relationships to find additional funding resources including local grants and donors.
9. When selecting your foster care liaison, it is recommended that he/she have child welfare experience.
10. Look at your current practices within the college and align the waiver process with an existing program where it makes sense.
11. Conduct trainings with staff from different departments to increase their understanding about this population of students.
12. If the school learns that a student is eligible after the drop/add date, the school should process a refund.
13. Determine the best and most efficient method to identify students who qualify in order to serve them right away.
14. Use a student-focused approach to inform your process:
 - Talk to the students and get input about their needs.
 - Develop and hold student-led forums with staff and community partners.
15. Leverage systems you may be using for other tuition waivers like homeless and vets.

Institutional Profiles of Campuses Effectively Administering the Waiver

St. Petersburg College

St. Petersburg College's (SPC) Foster Care Liaison Dr. Cheryl Kerr, who serves as the college's director of the Human Service Program, provided insight into how the Waiver works on her campus.

SPC requires that a student file their tuition exemption waiver one time only. The student presents the waiver to the Financial Aid Department, which waives the \$40 college application fee. In this department, the third-party billing coordinator credits the student's account.

Dr. Kerr works closely with the coordinator to make sure the student is on record to be provided special services by a variety of departments.

For internal tracking of individual student information including grades, personal information, residency, and financial aid status, SPC uses PeopleSoft (by Oracle).

As a comment on the hiring process of a dedicated coach, Dr. Kerr suggests that institutions require that the applicant have experience in the child welfare system.

Miami Dade College (MDC)

Students at Miami Dade College upload their tuition waiver when they apply for admission. Returning students' waivers now have their waiver processed automatically. Students receive a confirmation email letting them know their waiver has been applied.

To ensure that students don't fall between the cracks, Wendy Joseph, Program Coordinator, Educate Tomorrow at MDC, collects hardcopy tuition waivers from students and periodically verifies that student accounts are not left unpaid which would result in classes being dropped for non-payment. Classes being dropped also could impact students' eligibility for PESS and other supports. This process will take place across all MDC campuses.

MDC is also implementing a new procedure regarding residency requirements. When the tuition waiver is uploaded, students will automatically be classified as a Florida resident, as long as they have a valid Florida ID. Many students who qualify for the DCF tuition exemption are left in an out-of-state status, simply because they do not have the required documentation to prove that they have resided in Florida for a year or more. Now, the only forms required to prove residency for former foster youth are the DCF tuition exemption form and a Florida ID. Students will be classified as in-state even if their state ID has been issued for less than one year.

Appendix A: State of Florida Department of Children and Families Tuition Exemption Form



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carroll
Secretary

Date: _____

To: Florida Public State University, Public Florida College System Institution, or
Public Postsecondary Career and Technical Program

From: _____, Department of Children and Families
or Community Based Care Lead Agency

Title: _____

Subject: Tuition and Fee Exemption for Students Receiving or Formerly Receiving Services from the
Department of Children and Families

Please accept this letter certifying that _____ (name),
whose date of birth is _____, meets one of the following criteria necessary to obtain
exemption from paying tuition and fees at a Florida public state university, public Florida College System
institution or public postsecondary career and technical program, pursuant to the "Florida K-20 Education
Code," Section 1009.25(1)(c)-(d), Florida Statutes (check one):

- He or she is or was at the time he or she reached age 18 in the custody of the Department of
Children and Families;
- He or she was adopted from the Department of Children and Families after May 5, 1997;
- He or she is or was at the time of reaching age 18 in the custody of a relative under s. 39.5085, F.S.;
- He or she is or was at the time of reaching age 18 in the custody of a non-relative under s. 39.5085,
F.S.; or,
- He or she was placed in a guardianship by the court after spending at least 6 months in the custody
of the department after reaching 16 years of age.

The tuition and fee exemption **CANNOT** be used at an out-of-state educational institution or in-state private
university, private community college or private postsecondary career and technical program. Please contact
the financial aid office at the school to determine whether alternative tuition and fee exemptions or
scholarships are available through the school.

Effective July 1, 2010¹, this exemption remains valid until the young person reaches the age 28, which
will occur on _____
(MMDD/YYYY)

Please contact _____, Florida Department of Children and Families
or Community Based Care Lead Agency at _____ to verify information contained
in this form or for additional information.

Signature of Community-Based Care Lead Agency representative

Date Signed

¹ Please note: If you are receiving this form when leaving the custody of DCF, but are not ready to use the exemption at this time,
you will need to read Section 1009.25(1)(c), F.S., to ensure that the statute still provides the tuition and fee exemption for former
foster youth in the category in which you qualify. Florida laws may change from year to year.

STUDENTS: IF YOU USE THE DCF TUITION EXEMPTION TO PAY FOR SCHOOL, PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY!

1. The DCF tuition exemption is used by students who were in foster care/relative care/adopted.
2. When you register for classes, you must **IMMEDIATELY provide a copy of your new class schedule to your College Coach** (Ms. Wendy, Ms. Sandra) or the Admissions Supervisor at your campus.
3. **Only turn in your waiver if you are using it for the first time.** If you need to turn in your waiver, it must be an original (not a copy). Bring it to your College Coach.
4. If you do not follow this policy, your classes will be dropped for nonpayment or your financial aid/scholarships will be used to pay for your classes, and you will lose that money permanently .
5. Follow these steps to keep your money in your pockets 😊.

STUDENTS: IF YOU USE THE HOMELESS EXEMPTION TO PAY FOR SCHOOL, PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY!

1. The homeless verification letter/exemption is used by homeless/unaccompanied students who currently reside in a homeless shelter or transitional home.
2. When you register for classes, you must **IMMEDIATELY provide a copy of your new class schedule, homeless verification letter and signed homeless affidavit form** to your College Coach (Ms. Wendy, Ms. Sandra) or the Admissions Supervisor at your campus.
3. You must complete this process every semester, as long as you are eligible.
4. If you do not follow this policy, your classes will be dropped for nonpayment or your financial aid/scholarships will be used to pay for your classes, and you will lose that money permanently.
5. Follow these steps to keep your money in your pockets 😊.