

Foster Care & Education Q&A

TUITION WAIVERS FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Q: What is a tuition waiver?

A: A tuition waiver is a state program that increases access to higher education for current and former foster youth by “waiving” their tuition and fees at colleges and vocational schools under certain conditions.

Q: How many states offer tuition waivers?

A: At least 16 states offer tuition waivers, and in several more states, legislation to create tuition waivers is pending.

Q: Why do some states offer tuition waivers to foster youth?

A: Several states have adopted tuition waiver programs to help address the low rates of college attendance and completion among foster youth by making college more affordable for them. Less than 20 percent of college-eligible foster youth go on to higher education compared to 60 percent of youth in the general population. Moreover, only about 1 to 5 percent of foster youth earn bachelor’s degrees. The low rates of college attendance and completion among foster youth can be attributed to a variety of factors, including significant financial barriers to higher education. Many foster youth lack families who can help pay for their tuition,

co-sign their college loans, or provide them with a free place to live while they’re attending college or during school breaks. Waivers of tuition and fees help reduce the financial barriers to higher education for foster youth.

Q: At which schools can tuition waivers be used?

A: In nearly all states that have implemented tuition waiver programs, a tuition waiver can only be used at state-funded colleges and vocational schools within the state that provides the tuition waiver. There are, however, a few exceptions to this rule. For example, recipients of Connecticut’s tuition waiver can use the waiver at any institution of higher education, including at public and private colleges outside of Connecticut.

Q: Does a tuition waiver cover the full cost of college tuition and fees?

A: In the majority of states with tuition waiver programs, a student who is eligible for a tuition waiver must still apply for other forms of federal and state financial aid. In these states, a tuition waiver covers the difference between the student’s tuition and fees and the amount of federal and state financial aid the student receives. However, in a few states, such as Virginia and Texas, the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV)—a federal grant that



provides current and former foster youth with up to \$ 5000 per year for post-secondary education expenses—is not included in this calculation. In a few other states, such as Maine and Kansas, a tuition waiver covers the full cost of tuition and fees, regardless of the level of federal and state financial aid a student receives.

Q: Do tuition waivers cover other college related expenses, such as room and board?

A: In most states, tuition waivers only cover tuition and fees. In Connecticut, however, tuition waivers can be used to cover the full cost of attending college, including the cost of tuition, fees, room and board, books, tutoring, transportation, and health care.

In several states where tuition waivers only cover tuition and fees, recipients can rely on additional sources of government funds to pay for other college related expenses. For example, in the few states that offer full tuition waivers (i.e. waivers that are not discounted by the amount students receive from other sources of financial aid), students can use the additional forms of financial aid they receive to cover their room board expenses, and other college related costs. In addition, several of the states that offer tuition waivers also permit youth to remain in foster care until the age of 21. In these states, the room and board expenses of college students in foster care are paid for by their state’s child welfare system.

Q: Who is eligible to receive a tuition waiver?

A: To receive a tuition waiver, a student must have been in foster care during a specific period of his or her youth. The exact period differs across states. For example, in Oklahoma, students are eligible for tuition waivers if they were in foster care for at least

nine months between their 16th and 18th birthdays. In Maryland, students are eligible so long as they were in foster care when they received a high school diploma or GED. In several states, youth who were adopted from foster care after a certain age are also eligible to receive tuition waivers. For example, in North Carolina, youth who were adopted from foster care on or after their 12th birthday are eligible.

Q: Where can I learn more about tuition waivers?

A: For state-specific information about tuition waiver programs, see <http://fostercaretoadulthood.wikispaces.com/> and http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/state_pages/search.php?search_option=tuition_waiver.

