



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

**EDUCATION**

## **Unaccompanied Homeless Youth & Youth at Risk of Homelessness Documentation of Independent Student Status for the FAFSA & DCTAG Verification Guide (for 2020–21 School Year Applications)**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this guide is to provide guidance to homeless liaisons that are completing the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth & Youth at Risk of Homelessness Documentation of Independent Student Status for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and DC Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG) form on behalf of students who are applying for college financial aid in the District of Columbia.

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which amended the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MKV):

- Local education agency (LEA) homeless liaisons are now required to
  - Inform unaccompanied homeless youth of their status as an independent student when applying for college financial aid.
  - Help unaccompanied homeless youth to obtain assistance to receive verification for the FAFSA. 20 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)(x)(III)
- **LEA and school-based homeless liaisons can complete this form on behalf of their identified unaccompanied homeless students who are applying for college financial aid. The completed form waives the requirement to report parents'/guardians' financial information. This became effective beginning in the 2017-18 school year.**
- School counselors are required to advise, prepare, and improve the readiness of all youth experiencing homelessness for college. 20 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(K)

### **Identifying Unaccompanied Homeless Youth & Youth at Risk of Homelessness**

Students who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residency are considered to be experiencing homelessness. This includes temporarily living with other people because he/she has nowhere else to go; living in substandard housing (if it doesn't meet local building codes or the utilities are turned off, it is generally not adequate); living in emergency or transitional shelters (e.g., trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency after disasters); or living in motels, camping grounds, cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, or any public or private place not designed for humans to live in. It also includes living in the school dormitory if the student would otherwise be homeless.

A student living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent may be considered homeless even if the parent would provide support and a place to live. <sup>1</sup>

If a student has been identified by the LEA as an unaccompanied homeless youth or youth at risk of homelessness, the LEA or school-based homeless liaison, financial aid administrator (FAA) of the student’s college, or a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funded shelter director or designee or a Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) funded shelter director or designee may complete an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Documentation of Independent Student Status form on behalf of the student. The liaison must determine if the student is an unaccompanied youth who is experiencing homelessness or is self-supporting and at risk of being homeless. The LEA or school-based homeless liaison should make homeless youth determinations for financial aid purposes on a case-by-case basis.

The U.S. Department of Education’s guidance states that liaisons may continue to make a determination of a youth’s status as either unaccompanied and homeless, or as self-supporting and at risk of being homeless, for as long as the liaison has access to the information necessary to make such a determination for a particular youth. Liaisons may write subsequent year letters of verification for unaccompanied homeless youth through age 23 if they have the necessary information to write such a letter. If a liaison doesn’t have the information that is necessary to make the determination, either because the youth became homeless after high school, or because the liaison is no longer familiar with the youth’s circumstances, the financial aid administrator (of the student’s college or university) must make the determination.<sup>2</sup>

## Completing the Verification Form

The LEA or school-based homeless liaison should complete the following data details on the verification form:

Verification Form Field	Notes
<b>Re</b>	Identify the student’s first and last name here.
<b>DOB</b>	Identify the student’s date of birth.
<b>Current Mailing Address of Student</b>	House number, street name, apartment number if available. If none, please list name, phone number, and mailing address of current contact. This identified address should be the same one used for the FAFSA and/or DCTAG application.
<b>I am providing this letter of verification as a (check one)</b>	Homeless liaisons should check the box next to <i>A McKinney-Vento School District Liaison</i>
<b>This letter is to confirm that _____ was</b>	Student’s first and last name should be filled in the blank.

<sup>1</sup> 2019-20 Application and Verification Guide, page AVG-117, <https://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1920FSAHbkAVG.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 2019-20 Application and Verification Guide, page AVG-117, <https://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1920FSAHbkAVG.pdf>

Verification Form Field	Notes
<b>Check one:</b> <b>__an unaccompanied homeless youth after July 1, 2019</b>	This should only be selected if the student was living in a homeless situation, after July 1, 2019, and was not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. If selected, the student's first and last name should be filled in the blank after the date in the sentence below this selection.
<b>Check one:</b> <b>__an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness after July 1, 2019.</b>	This should only be selected if the student was not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, provides for his/her own living expenses entirely on his/her own, and is at risk of losing his/her housing after July 1, 2019. If selected, the student's first and last name should be filled in the blank after the date in the sentence below this selection.
<b>Authorized Signature</b>	Signature of homeless liaison
<b>Date</b>	Date that the verification form was completed.
<b>Print Name</b>	Print name of homeless liaison.
<b>Telephone Number</b>	Phone number of homeless liaison
<b>Email</b>	LEA homeless liaison's email address.
<b>Title</b>	List LEA or school-based homeless liaison as the title if that is the referring person.
<b>School/Agency</b>	Identify the name of the LEA and/or school.
<b>Student's Signature</b>	Signature of the unaccompanied, homeless youth attesting to the information being true and accurate.
<b>Student's Printed Name</b>	Printed name of the unaccompanied, homeless youth.

Once completed, two hard copies should be given to the student. One copy is for submission with their FAFSA and/or DCTAG applications, and the second copy is for the student to keep in their records in case it is requested later.

## Terms and Definitions

The following is an explanation of terms that were used in this guidance document:

### Legislative Definitions:

- **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** – signed by President Obama on Dec. 10, 2015, and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the national education legislation which provides equal opportunity for all students.
- **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MKV)** – a federal law that ensures immediate enrollment and educational stability for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Was amended by ESSA.

### Financial Aid Definitions:

- **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** – a form that can be prepared annually by current and prospective college students (undergraduate and graduate) in the United States to

determine their eligibility for student financial aid.

- **DC Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG)** – provides up to \$10,000 toward the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition at public colleges and universities (two-year and four-year) throughout the US, Guam and Puerto Rico. DCTAG also provides up to \$2,500 per academic year toward tuition at private colleges and universities in the District and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) nationwide. Applications are accepted annually Feb. 1 – June 30.

**Homeless Liaison Definition:** a staff person selected by a LEA administrator to serve as the primary point of contact between the LEA and OSSE’s Homeless Education Program regarding matters concerning students identified as experiencing homelessness within the LEA.

### **Homeless Youth Definitions:<sup>3</sup>**

- **At risk of being homeless** – when a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
- **Homeless** – lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
- **Self-supporting** – when a student pays for his own living expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
- **Unaccompanied** – when a student is not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

### **Housing Definitions:**

- **Fixed** – stationary, permanent, and not subject to change.
- **Regular** – used on a predictable, routine, or consistent basis.
- **Adequate** – sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in the home.

## **OSSE Contact Information**

For inquiries regarding the verification form or supports for students and families in homeless situations, please contact one of the following OSSE staff:

Nicole Lee-Mwandha, [Nicole.Lee-Mwandha@dc.gov](mailto:Nicole.Lee-Mwandha@dc.gov), (202) 654-6123

Tasheen Stallings, [Tasheen.Stallings@dc.gov](mailto:Tasheen.Stallings@dc.gov), (202) 478-5927

Danielle Rollins, [Danielle.Rollins@dc.gov](mailto:Danielle.Rollins@dc.gov), (202) 741-0255

For inquiries regarding DCTAG or FAFSA, please contact:

DCTAG Office, Main Number: (202) 727-2824 or Toll-free: (877) 485-6751

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<sup>3</sup> 2019-20 Application and Verification Guide, page AVG-117,  
<https://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1920FSAHbkAVG.pdf>