



Financial Aid Independent Student Status for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Are you concerned about qualifying for financial aid? The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) requires parent information if you are under the age of 24, unless you meet certain criteria. We want to ensure that all students have the opportunity to receive a financial aid package accurately based on their financial and living situations. If you are experiencing homelessness or are not in the care of a parent or guardian, you may qualify as an independent student on the FAFSA. Under federal law (FAFSA Simplification Act, Public Law No: 116-260), schools are required to confirm your dependency status before removing the requirement to provide parent information. A review of your living situation will determine if you are considered an unaccompanied homeless youth so we can update your dependency accordingly. If approved, you will be considered for federal financial aid without providing parent information.

Definitions are based on the FAFSA Simplification Act (Public Law No: 116-260):

Homeless

A student is considered homeless if they lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing. This is broader than just living “on the street.” It includes temporarily living with other people because the student had 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, for example, trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 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. For more information on the definition of homelessness, see [“Does My Living Situation Meet the Definition of Homelessness?”](#)

Unaccompanied

When a student is not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Youth

Any student who is not yet 24 may qualify for a homeless youth determination.

Self-Supporting

When a student pays for their own living expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing.

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.

If any of these living situations apply to you, please follow the instructions on the following page.

How do I request a review of my dependency status?

1. Complete your [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) for the appropriate year. You will be asked if you are at risk of homelessness. If you believe you are an unaccompanied homeless youth, answer “yes” to this question.
2. Provide documentation from any of the following authorized sources that attest you have experienced homelessness as an unaccompanied youth, or were unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of homelessness, any time on or after July 1 of the year prior to the academic year for which you are applying.
Submit your documentation through our secure form: https://northern.formstack.com/forms/pii_forms, and in the “Additional Notes” section of the form, please specify that your documentation is provided for an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth/Dependency Status review.
 - a. School district homeless liaisons or their designee;
 - b. The director or designee of a director of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other program serving individuals who are experiencing homelessness;
 - c. The director or a designee of a director of a program funded under a TRIO or Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for an Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) grant; or
 - d. A financial aid administrator at another institution who previously made a determination.
3. If you are unable to obtain documentation from at least one of the parties listed above, a financial aid administrator (FAA) will make a determination based on an interview either in-person or via Zoom.
 - a. The FAA will ask you questions regarding your current and past living situations and circumstances that have led to the risk of homelessness.
 - b. Call or email the Financial Aid Office to schedule an interview with a financial aid administrator at (605) 626-2640 or finaid@northern.edu.

Once we review your FAFSA and conduct an interview, we will then determine your dependency status. If approved, a correction will be made to your FAFSA to make you independent. Once the updated FAFSA reaches our office we will review it and send you an official financial aid offer. This process will take no longer than 60 days after receiving your complete documentation. Any student who is approved for being considered an unaccompanied homeless youth will continue to be independent for each subsequent award year unless the student informs us that their circumstances have changed, or we have conflicting information about the student’s independence. Students must still submit their FAFSA each year but should not need to take additional action to be considered an independent student in subsequent years.