Maryland
Department of Human Services
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Maryland Tuition Waiver FAQ

This document contains frequently asked questions about the foster care tuition waiver and will be updated as new questions are received. If you have additional questions, please email the Social Services Administration at dlolderyouthpermanency_dhs@maryland.gov.

1. **I was in foster care at age 10 and exited to guardianship in 2018. I am attending college in the fall, and I see that the age for tuition waiver eligibility has changed as of July 1, 2026. Does this mean that I am eligible?**
   Yes, if you now meet the age eligibility requirements for the tuition waiver and are attending a Maryland public college or university, you can request it. You must also meet the other requirements: complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA), be under 25 for initial use, and have not completed a Bachelor's degree. If you are unsure about your eligibility, please reach out to dlolderyouthpermanency_dhs@maryland.gov; we can confirm your eligibility and provide a letter for your financial aid office as verification.

2. **I am a junior attending a Maryland Public University and am now eligible for the Foster Care tuition waiver due to the change in eligibility age. Can I be reimbursed for my freshman and sophomore tuition?**
   No, the tuition waiver can not be applied retroactively, and you cannot receive a reimbursement. If you are now eligible for the tuition waiver due to the law change as of July 1, 2026, you can have the tuition waiver applied to your upcoming junior and senior year, as long as you meet all other eligibility requirements (filed the FAFSA and MSFAA and are under age 25 for initial use).

3. **My school says I need to provide proof of my eligibility for the foster care tuition waiver. How do I do that?**
   Please contact dlolderyouthpermanency_dhs@maryland.gov, and share your name and date of birth to request a tuition waiver eligibility letter. We will confirm your eligibility and send you a letter to share with your college for verification. This letter is accepted by all Maryland public colleges and universities, and if the financial aid office has further questions, they should contact the Emerging Adults program at SSA (dlolderyouthpermanency_dhs@maryland.gov).

4. **I'm not sure I want to go to a 4-year college; I may just want to get a certificate. What should I do?**
   There are many certificate programs at Maryland Community Colleges, and these programs are eligible for the tuition waiver (as long as they're not continuing education certificates). Once you initially use the tuition waiver, you can continue to use the waiver for an additional 9 years or until you complete a Bachelor's degree, whichever occurs first.
   This means you can complete a certificate, work for two years, then complete an associate's degree (2-year degree), work for another year, and then finish a Bachelor's degree (an additional 2 or 4 years depending on the degree chosen). The tuition waiver can be used throughout this time to cover multiple certifications, associate's degrees, or to work your way up to earning a Bachelor's degree if you initially don't feel prepared for a 4-year college.

5. **I want to attend a trade school to get my certification. I'm thinking about attending Lincoln Tech, will they accept the Tuition Waiver?**
   No, private trade schools like Lincoln Tech will not accept the Tuition waiver. The tuition waiver is only eligible at Maryland Public Colleges and Universities. If there is a specific program or certification you are interested in, try to find it at a community college where the tuition waiver can be used. A list of Maryland Public Colleges and Universities can be found on the MHEC website (be sure to select Public Institution for college type):
   https://mhec.maryland.gov/institutions_training/Pages/collegeinfo.aspx

6. **How can I get the most out of the foster care tuition waiver?**
   There are multiple ways to take advantage of the tuition waiver so you make the most out of your college experience.
   First: Know your financial aid. The waiver **does not** cover all of your college expenses; you will still need to cover room and board, books and other school supplies, transportation, and other living expenses while attending college. So apply for federal and state scholarships and grants by completing the FAFSA and MSFAA by June 30th. Make sure that once you are offered aid, you review all aid and accept all scholarships and grants you are offered. Double-check that what you are offered 100% covers the cost of attendance for your school. If it does not, you may end up owing the school money and should apply for additional private scholarships, seek alternative aid (like the

Education and Training Voucher program), or accept loans (this should be a last resort).

Options for Using the Tuition Waiver:

Study Abroad- If your college or university has a study abroad program, where the program fees are paid through your Maryland college or university, then the tuition waiver can be applied to waive the tuition fees. But this still means that you may have to pay the foreign institution for room and board, for flights, and any additional living expenses while living abroad. Many colleges and universities offer scholarships for study abroad programs, making this opportunity possible for students. If this experience interests you, plan ahead, talk to the study abroad office, apply for scholarships, and make a financial plan! This opportunity is one that youth in care have taken advantage of, using the waiver to do so.

4+1 Master's Degree Programs

Some degree programs combine a Bachelor's and a Master's degree, typically called a 4+1. This means that during the fourth year of your Bachelor's degree (your senior year), you will also be taking some Master's level classes. This way, when you complete your Bachelor's degree, you will only need one year to complete your Master's degree. But this also means the tuition waiver covers the cost of tuition for any classes you take before completing your Bachelor's degree, including Master's-level courses, since they also count toward your Bachelor's degree. Once you have fulfilled the requirements of your Bachelor's degree, you can no longer utilize the tuition waiver, so you will have to use other financial aid to complete the one year of the Master's degree program. But if you know you want (or need) a Master's degree for your career, exploring a 4+1 program may be beneficial to ensure that you only have the financial cost of one year of a Master's degree versus the typical two years.

7. **If I am an undocumented youth, how can I access the tuition waiver?**
   The current law requires students to complete the FAFSA and MSFAA. As an undocumented student, you will not be able to complete the FAFSA, but you should attempt to do so until you can't proceed with the application. Take a screenshot of your FASFA as proof for your financial aid office if they request

it, and then complete the MSFAA. Make sure to speak with your financial aid office early to inform them of your status and explain why you only completed the MSFAA.

8. **If I was placed out of state by Maryland DSS or currently live out of state, can I still use the tuition waiver?**
   If you were placed out of state at any time during your out-of-home case by Maryland DSS, whether you went to a residential facility or went to live with family, you qualify for the tuition waiver. You are still eligible for the tuition waiver if you live outside of Maryland, but attend a Maryland public college or university. Your college may say that you are being charged out-of-state tuition, and that they can't apply the tuition waiver to the full tuition amount; this is not correct. No matter what they are charging you for tuition, the full amount of tuition and mandatory fees is waived under the waiver.