Paul Mitchell The School Colorado Springs

PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

The Higher Education Act of 1992 allows financial aid administrators to make professional judgment (PJ) decisions for special or unusual family or student circumstances. These circumstances must be documented. The Financial Aid Department must analyze special and/or unusual circumstance(s) requiring professional judgment decisions on a case-by-case basis and only the Financial Aid Department has the authority to adjust a student's eligibility using professional judgment.

The reason for the adjustment must relate to that student's special and/or unusual circumstance(s) and must be documented in the student's file. All requested documentation must be submitted to evaluate the PJ request.

To account for special circumstance(s) of a student, an institution may choose to exercise professional judgment (PJ) to adjust a student's cost of attendance or the data that determine a student's expected family contribution (EFC). An institution's decision regarding adjustments is final and cannot be appealed to the Department.

CIRCUMSTANCES THAT COULD WARRANT A PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

The law gives some examples of special circumstances that MAY be considered (HEA Sec. 479A):
• Change in employment status, income, or assets
• Change in housing status (e.g., homelessness)
• Tuition expenses at an elementary or secondary school
• Medical, dental, or nursing home expenses not covered by insurance
• Child or dependent care expenses
• Severe disability of the student or other member of the student's household
• Other changes or adjustments that impact the student's costs or ability to pay for college

WHAT IS A DEPENDENCY OVERRIDE?

A dependency override occurs when a financial aid administrator exercises professional judgment and overrides the Department of Education's criteria for dependent students. An override may only be granted on a case-by-case basis for students with unusual circumstances. These circumstances must show compelling reason for a student to be considered independent rather than dependent.

WHAT CONDITIONS COULD WARRANT A DEPENDENCY OVERRIDE?

The following are some examples of conditions that could warrant a Dependency Override:
• Documented parental abandonment or severe estrangement from parents
• Human trafficking, as described in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (22 U.S.C. 7101 et seq)
• Legally granted refugee or asylum status
• Parental drug use
• Parental mental incapacity
• Physical or emotional abuse
• Parental incarceration

HOMELESS YOUTH DETERMINATIONS

A student is considered homeless if he or she lacks fixed, regular, and adequate housing. This is broader than just living “on the street.” It includes but is not limited to:

• Youth sharing housing with other people temporarily because they had nowhere else to go

• Youth living in emergency or transitional shelters, for example, trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency after disasters

• Youth living in motels, campgrounds, cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, substandard housing, or any public or private place not designed for humans to live in

• Youth living in the school dormitory if they would otherwise be homeless

• Youth who are migrants and who qualify as experiencing homeless because they are living in circumstances described above

If you have special and/or unusual circumstances, contact the financial services team. You will be asked to complete forms and provide supporting documentation.