FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST
FIGHTING FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

TUITION EXEMPTION: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

FLORIDA YOUTH SHINE

Florida's Tuition & Fee Exemption for Students who had Child Welfare Involvement.

1. WHAT IS THE TUITION AND FEE EXEMPTION?

It's the term for the law (Fla. Stat. §1009.25) that provides **free college tuition** to many students who were in the child welfare system.

- People also use the term "tuition waiver," the two things are the same.
- There is no money exchanged, the law just tells the school that it cannot charge the student for tuition or fees.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR TO THE TUITION & FEE EXEMPTION?

Students who turned 18 while in **out-of-home care**

- Out-of-home care includes: foster care, group home, relative or non-relative placement.
- This includes to students in out-of-home care who start college before turning age 18.

Students who were placed into **guardianship** in their child welfare case.

- Student must remain in the guardianship until age 18 or start college.

Students who were **adopted** from state care after May 5, 1997.

Students who were **reunified** with a parent as an older teen.*

- Must have spent at least 18 months in out of home care after age 14.
- Must also be eligible for PELL Grants. (This excludes undocumented immigrant students, including DACA recipients.)

3. WHAT SCHOOLS ACCEPT THE TUITION & FEE EXEMPTION? (CLICK THE LINKS FOR A LIST)

- State Universities that are public
- Colleges in the Florida College System
- School District Workforce Education Programs - You may know these as vocational schools.

* Change to Florida law effective July 1, 2022.

4. HOW LONG IS THE TUITION & FEE EXEMPTION GOOD FOR?

Until age 28.

5. WHAT DOES THE TUITION & FEE EXEMPTION COVER?

- Tuition
- Fees – the statute exempts ALL fees – here are some examples of fees listed in the Board of Governor's Regulations 7.001, 7.003

  - › Activity Fee
  - › Admissions Deposit
  - › Application Fee
  - › Athletic Fee
  - › Capital Improvement Fee
  - › Diploma Replacement Fee
  - › Health Fee
  - › Lab Fees
  - › Late Registration Fee
  - › Non-Resident Student Financial Aid Fee
  - › Orientation
  - › Security Fee
  - › Student Financial Aid Fee
  - › Technology Fee
  - › Transcript Fee
  - › Tuition Differential

6. DOES THE TUITION EXEMPTION COVER BOOKS, SUPPLIES OR LIVING EXPENSES?

The tuition and fee exemption does not cover books, supplies or living expenses.

- Contact your Independent Living Specialist to see if you are eligible for assistance through Postsecondary Education Services & Supports, Aftercare or Extended Foster care.
- Contact your Campus Liaison to find out if your school offers additional support to students. Find them on the Positive Pathways website.

7. HOW DO I ACCESS THE TUITION & FEE EXEMPTION?

- Obtain a document describing your eligibility from the Community Based Care lead agency in the community where your child welfare case was located.
  - To find the right person, use this list of Independent Living Contacts.
  - Adoptees use this list of Post Adoption Support Counselors.
- Contact the school's financial aid office to determine its process for using the exemption.

8. DO I HAVE TO PROVIDE DOCUMENTATION EVERY SEMESTER?

NO! Schools are required to keep your original documentation and cannot make additional requests for the documentation.* (Fla. Stat. §409.1452(1)(b).

****However, you should always check and make sure that your tuition exception is being applied to your account each semester.**

9. IS THERE A LIMITATION ON HOW MANY CREDIT HOURS I CAN TAKE?

There is NO LIMIT on the number of credit hours!

10. CAN I USE THE TUITION AND FEE EXEMPTION FOR GRADUATE COURSES, MEDICAL SCHOOL, OR LAW SCHOOL?

Yes. There is NO LIMIT on the type of courses or of the degree you seek. All courses that the schools charge tuition for from trade school to medical school –are included.

BUT NOTE -not every course advertised by a school is a class that they charge tuition for. Many schools advertise special programs or courses that are actually provided by an entity outside of the college or university. If the other entity collects the tuition and fees for the course. you may not be able to use your tuition exemption.

11. WHO CAN HELP ME WITH QUESTIONS & ISSUES ABOUT THE EXEMPTION?

Find your Campus Liaison! Every school is required to have a "knowledgeable, accessible and responsive" liaison to assist student in resolving problems.* (Fla. Stat. §409.1452(1)(a)). If you weren't provided that information already -

- Check the school's website.
- Contact your Independent Living Specialist.
- Check the Positive Pathways website for a current list of Liaisons.

12. WHAT DO I DO IF THE SCHOOL WON'T APPLY THE EXEMPTION?

Find out the exact reason why you are being denied – **get the decision in writing**.

- If you need additional documentation to prove eligibility, contact the Independent Living Specialist for assistance.

* Change to Florida law effective July 1, 2022.

- Work with the Liaison to get a resolution.
- Ask the Liaison to contact the school's General Counsel for advice. If they are not willing to do that, you can try contacting the General Counsel yourself.
- If you are still having problems, contact us at fcf@floridaschildrenfirst.org

13. CAN I GET MONEY BACK IF I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE CHARGED?

MAYBE.

- There is no set process you can use to get back money that you paid or was taken from your financial aid.
- Ask the Campus Liaison for help in getting your money back.
- Ask for the refund as soon as you find out that you were wrongfully charged.
- Your chance of succeeding is higher if the school knew or should have known that you were not supposed to be charged. For example,
  - If your tuition was exempted in past semesters.
  - If school has documentation about your status as a former foster youth or in a guardianship that show you were entitled to the exemption.

IF YOU ENCOUNTER PROBLEMS OR HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU CANNOT GET ANSWERED CONTACT FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST AT FCF@FLORIDASCHILDRENFIRST.ORG

Florida's Children First has used its best efforts in collecting and preparing material included in this publication but does not warrant that the information herein is complete or accurate, and does not assume, and hereby disclaims, any liability to any person for any loss or damage caused by errors or omissions herein, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident or any other cause. This publication is intended for use as a general reference source for young people in state care and those who have recently aged out, along with their advocates and case workers. It is not meant to provide legal opinions or advice, and is not a substitute for the advice of an attorney.