

# TIPS FOR FLORIDA HOMELESS HIGHER EDUCATION LIAISONS

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Many institutions of higher education are designating liaisons for students experiencing homelessness. Similar to their counterparts in K-12 education, homeless higher education liaisons support students by connecting them to available resources on and off campus, and by removing barriers to college retention and success.

Florida's [HB 1577](#) and companion [SB 1708](#) require public colleges and universities to designate knowledgeable, accessible, and responsive higher education campus liaisons to support youth experiencing homelessness or from foster care, and provide the liaison's contact information to all students receiving Florida's homeless/foster tuition waiver, as well as publish it on the institution's website.

The state Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability must study the effectiveness of campus liaisons and issue recommendations for improvements. The report must be submitted to the legislature by December 1, 2022. This tip sheet provides basic strategies and legal summaries for Florida's higher education liaisons to better support their students.

## **1. TRAIN FACULTY AND STAFF TO BECOME AWARE OF SIGNS THAT ANY STUDENT ON CAMPUS MAY BE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.**

### **WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?**

- Sharing housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- Staying in an emergency or transitional shelter
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, or similar settings

### **WHAT ARE SOME SIGNS OF HOMELESSNESS?**

- Students staying late or sleeping on campus until buildings close, like the library, student center, 24 hour study rooms, etc.
- Social behavioral changes like withdrawal, aggression, clinginess, difficulty with peer and/or adult relationships
- Lack of participation in class, poor attention span, or sudden decline in academic achievement
- Poor hygiene, unmet medical/dental needs, wearing the same clothes repeatedly, fatigue, sickness

## **2. ENSURE THAT FACULTY, STAFF, AND STUDENTS ARE AWARE OF YOUR ROLE AS A HOMELESS HIGHER EDUCATION LIAISON.**

- Send an introductory email to all students informing them of your role and the resources the institution provides.
- Ensure your contact information is shared during orientation and consistently during the school year. Make sure that your email is clearly visible on the institution's website, per [HB 1577](#).
- Host training for faculty and staff to learn more about homeless students on campus and how they can support them.
- Participate in Resident Assistant (RA) or other student leadership training to ensure that student leaders are aware of the homeless liaison's role.
- Encourage faculty members to include a note on their syllabus about the homeless liaison position and resources available on campus that address basic needs.
- Create a clear, accessible referral system where students, faculty, and staff can easily refer students to you.

### **3. CREATE A COMFORTABLE, RELAXING OFFICE SPACE FOR STUDENTS. STUDENTS SHOULD FEEL SAFE AND WELCOME.**

- Provide clear instructions on how to get to your office by providing a map, or offer to meet students somewhere else on campus.
- Make confidentiality a priority. Don't require students to share specific details about the events that led to their lack of housing. Sharing these details may be emotionally difficult and is not necessary to provide assistance.
- Ask students what efforts they're already making to address their basic needs before offering advice.
- Be compassionate, but direct, and make sure students know you have their best interest in mind.
- If available, offer snacks or other food to students. Food in your office might be the first meal students have eaten all day.
- Help students make connections with additional resources on campus (housing, counseling, food pantry, clothing closets, etc.) or in the community.
- Build rapport with students and learn about their interests, major, school activities, etc.

### **4. ESTABLISH STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY PARTNERS ON AND OFF CAMPUS.**

- Establish a relationship with K-12 McKinney-Vento liaisons to assist with the identification and transition of youth who are homeless entering from high school.
- Host annual trainings with specific key offices that interact with students experiencing homelessness.
- Consider having office-based liaisons or specific points of contact in key offices that have specialized training in homelessness.

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## 4. ESTABLISH STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY PARTNERS ON AND OFF CAMPUS (CONT).

- **Financial Aid**

- While it is important to be mindful of and comply with the Higher Education Act and privacy laws, partner with the financial aid office or admissions office to obtain aggregate data of students who indicated independent status on the FAFSA or their college application, and send them information on support programs and resources.
- Work with financial aid to mitigate the challenges students experiencing homelessness face with the FAFSA determination process.
- Remind students that they can fill out the FAFSA starting on October 1st and that you can provide assistance if needed.
- Consider homelessness as an extenuating circumstance for students who are otherwise unable to meet the requirements for Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) in order to maintain state-authorized student financial aid programs.
- Ensure students experiencing homelessness are part of the tuition waiver exemption and they have the proper documentation needed through the amendments of HB 1577/SB 1708.

- **Housing**

- Partner with student housing to establish a temporary emergency housing plan, options, or program. If your institution doesn't have residence halls, consider a host home program or partnering with local hotel/motels or community agencies.
- Advocate for student housing to remain open during all academic breaks, including, winter, spring, and summer breaks. If this is not possible, work with students to come up with a housing plan for those times.
- Prioritize students experiencing homelessness for on-campus housing if available.

- **The Community**

- Assist students in applying for all federal, state, and local services, including public benefits like SNAP or Medicare.
- Establish personal connections with shelters, non-profits, or other homeless services in the area that specialize in and are safe for youth and young adults. Some communities may have a committee of people that organize, meet monthly, and share resources and support.

## 5. ROUTINELY FOLLOW UP WITH STUDENTS TO MONITOR THEIR ACADEMIC PROGRESS AS WELL AS THEIR PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.

- Find out how each student prefers to communicate (texting, emailing, phone, etc.).
- Help students design a short-term and long-term plan with tangible outcomes and goals.
- Empower and challenge students to advocate for themselves and for changes at the institution that better support students experiencing homelessness.
- Schedule regular check-in meetings with students.

Create data points to measure the effectiveness and impact of the homeless higher education liaisons. Identify the baseline number of students experiencing homelessness, change in retention, graduation rates, and other qualitative data. Per Florida's bills, the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability must study the effectiveness of campus liaisons and issue recommendations for improvements. The report must be submitted to the legislature by December 1, 2022.

Continue your own professional development and training by reading tip sheets and watching webinars hosted by [SchoolHouse Connection](#).

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## FLORIDA LAWS

### §1009.25

A student who meets the definition of homeless children or youth in the education provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act is exempt from the payment of tuition and fees for a school district workforce education program, Florida College System institution, or state university.

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### HB 1577 / SB 1708

State colleges and universities must designate higher education campus liaisons to support youth experiencing homelessness or foster care. Liaisons must be knowledgeable, accessible, and responsive in assisting students with the homeless/foster tuition waiver and accessing on-campus support. Institutions must provide the liaison's contact information to all students receiving the homeless/foster tuition waiver, as well as publish it on the institution's website.

# FLORIDA LAWS (CONT)

## HB 1577 / SB 1708 (Cont)

Public colleges and universities also may provide campus coaching services and other support for successful postsecondary completion and transition to independent living for students experiencing homelessness or foster care. The state Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability must study the effectiveness of campus liaisons and issue recommendations for improvements. The report must be submitted to the legislature by December 1, 2022.

The bill amended Florida's tuition exemption in several ways:

- The definition of "homelessness" is now the same as the definition in the Higher Education Act, which includes youth sharing the housing of others due to the loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.
- The exemption is now aligned with federal FAFSA rules, so that documentation of homelessness sufficient for the FAFSA must be accepted for the state tuition waiver, and documentation must be submitted only once while the student is in college, unless the college has specific information that a student's status has changed.

## RESOURCES:

- [Youth Homelessness and Higher Education Overview](#)
- [Tip Sheets for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed](#)
- [Financial Aid](#)

### Florida Specific:

- [Youth Homelessness and Higher Education Overview](#)
- [Tip Sheets for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed](#)
- [Financial Aid](#)
- [Putting All the Pieces Together: Creating Opportunities for Success for Students Experiencing Homelessness at USF](#)
- [Want to Help Students Experiencing Homelessness Go to College?](#)
- [I Experienced Homelessness. Lawmakers, Help Young Floridians like Me Find Independence](#)
- [Why Florida's Legislator Should Vote for HB 177/SB 1708 - Rebecca's Testimony](#)
- [Lessons Learned from the Past Year: A Panel on Supporting College Students with Experience in Foster Care and Homelessness Recorded Webinar](#)
- [Addressing Student Homelessness and Financial Distress at UCF Recorded Webinar](#)