

# TIPS FOR LOUISIANA 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.

Louisiana's [HB 906](#) requires that each public postsecondary education institution in the state must designate a Homeless and Foster Student Liaison within its financial aid office. The liaison is responsible for applying federal financial aid rules related to youth experiencing homelessness (or who have experienced homeless at any time over the six years prior to enrollment), and youth who were in foster care for at least six months between ages 16 and 18. The law also includes that a public post-secondary education institution that offers student housing may develop a plan to provide access to housing resources during and between academic terms for current and former homeless and youth.

The plan also may give them priority for housing placement and offer placement in housing facilities that remain open during the most days a year. The institution may also grant resident status to a student who: currently resides in Louisiana; is 19 years old or younger at the time of enrollment, and was homeless at any time during the two years immediately preceding enrollment. This tip sheet provides basic strategies and legal summaries for Louisiana's 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 website.
- 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**

- Under HB 906, the homeless and foster youth liaison must be in the financial aid office.
- Stay up to date with new provisions for the FAFSA, especially those pertaining to homeless and foster youth.
- Remind students that they can fill out the FAFSA starting on October 1st and that you can provide assistance if needed.
- Prioritize unaccompanied homeless youth determinations by utilizing the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) financial aid tool.
- Create designated office hours for youth experiencing homelessness.
- 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.

- **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.
- HB 906 states that a public post-secondary education institution that offers student housing may develop a plan to provide access to housing resources during and between academic terms for current and former homeless and youth. The plan also may give them priority for housing placement and offer placement in housing facilities that remain open during the most days a year.

- **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.
- Under HB 906, public postsecondary education institutions may grant resident status to a student who: currently resides in Louisiana: is 19 years old or younger at the time of enrollment, and was homeless at any time during the two years immediately preceding enrollment.

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

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### **LOUISIANA LAWS**

#### HB 906

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#### **RESOURCES:**

- [Youth Homelessness and Higher Education Overview](#)
- [Tip Sheets for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed](#)
- [Financial Aid](#)
- [Dorm Room Dreamz: Taking Action to Address College Homelessness](#)