



Free College Tuition for Former Foster Youth New law gives “tuition waivers” to youth for Oregon community colleges and public universities.

For many youth aging out of Oregon’s foster care system, college is simply not a financial reality. With little to no family support or savings, foster youth are hard-pressed to cover tuition and fees, let alone the cost of living expenses and books. Too often the process of piecing together financial aid to meet these needs is full of roadblocks and delays that prevent foster youth from registering for classes. Tuition waivers for foster youth will guarantee that these students have access to Oregon community colleges and public universities.

At age 18, many foster youth become solely responsible for themselves almost overnight with little or no support. Tuition waivers will alleviate one major challenge to gaining economic independence through education. Currently, 25% of former foster youth enter college, while only 6% complete a 2 or 4-year degree, most citing financial constraints. In fact, only 2.5% of former foster youth earn a Bachelors Degree compared to 19% of the general population.

The Oregon Legislature passed this law to address the unique needs of foster youth. They wanted to send a message to these young adults—if you have the grades, the motivation, and the dream to go to college, YOU CAN.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A TUITION WAIVER?

- Youth must have spent at least one year in Oregon foster care between the ages of 16-21.
- Youth must enroll in an institution of higher education within three years of leaving foster care, or earning their high school diploma/GED, whichever is earliest.

- Youth may only apply the waiver towards the maximum of a Bachelors Degree.
- Youth may only access the waiver until age 25.
- Youth must attend an Oregon community college or public university.

HOW DO YOUTH APPLY?

- Apply for state and federal financial aid (FAFSA). The tuition waiver covers only the portion of tuition and fees not provided by federal PELL and Oregon Opportunity Grants. Chafee grants will be retained by the student for cost of living expenses.
- Recipients are required to complete at least 30 hours of community service each academic year to continue receiving the tuition waiver.
- Oregon Student Assistance Commission (OSAC) is establishing additional protocols to file for a tuition waiver, more detailed information will be available after January 1, 2012. Visit:

www.ORYouthConnection.org/Free-Tuition

TUITION WAIVER ELIGIBILITY Q&A

YOUTH MUST HAVE SPENT 12 OR MORE MONTHS IN FOSTER CARE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 16 AND 18.

If a youth was in foster care for 6 months, left, and returned to foster care for another six months. Does she or he qualify?

Yes, if those months occurred between ages 16 and 21. Youth only have to accumulate 1 year in foster care; it is not necessary to have 12 months in a row.

If youth choose to remain in foster care until 21, can she or he access the waiver for college while still in a foster home?

Yes! In fact, youth should do this in order to remain eligible. Youth need to enroll in college and apply for a tuition waiver within 3 years of leaving foster care or completing high school/GED, whichever happens first. Thus, if a youth graduates from high school at age 18, he or she must apply for the waiver by the age of 21 whether they are in foster care or not.

YOUTH MUST ENROLL IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION WITHIN THREE YEARS OF EITHER A) LEAVING THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM OR B) EARNING A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA/GED, WHICHEVER IS EARLIEST.

If a youth is older than 18, has not obtained a Diploma or GED, and plans to stay in foster care until age 21, what is the deadline for applying for the waiver?

They have three years immediately following a) leaving foster care, or b) getting a GED or Diploma. So, whichever comes first will start their 3 year deadline. A youth who graduates from high school at age 19, for example, may apply for the waiver at age 22 if they remained in foster care until age 19, as well.

If a youth earns a diploma/GED at 18, but remains in foster care until 21, does he or she have 3 more years to access the waiver?

No. However, youth can access the tuition waiver to attend college while she or he is still in a foster care placement.

If a youth spent one year in foster care and left at 17, but graduated high school at 18. How long does she or he have to access the tuition waiver?

Youth must access it by age 20, since foster care ended at 17. The time period starts with the first of two possible events: leaving foster care or graduating high school.

YOUTH MAY ONLY RECEIVE A TUITION WAIVER TOWARDS THE MAXIMUM OF A BACHELOR'S DEGREE.

If a youth wants to go on to graduate school, can the waiver help?

No. Youth can apply the waiver towards an Associate's or Bachelor's degree, but the waiver does not apply beyond that level.

Can she or he start out at a community college, and then transfer to a 4-year college?

Yes. However, youth will no longer receive the tuition waiver after age 24.

YOUTH MAY ONLY ACCESS THE WAIVER UNTIL AGE 25.

If youth begin using the waiver, but are unable to complete the degree by the age of 25, can the waiver be extended?

No. They would need to rely on financial aid and find other scholarships to finish the degree.

YOUTH MUST APPLY FOR FASFA. TUITION IS WAIVED TO THE PORTION OF TUITION AND FEES NOT COVERED BY FEDERAL PELL AND OREGON OPPORTUNITY GRANTS.

Does this mean a youth's Chafee funding will also go towards tuition?

No. The waiver kicks in after the Pell and Oregon Opportunity Grants. If youth also receive a Chafee housing subsidy, or Chafee ETV, that funding can help cover the cost of living.

YOUTH MUST COMPLETE AT LEAST 30 HOURS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE EACH ACADEMIC YEAR TO CONTINUE RECEIVING THE WAIVER.

If a senior in high school has not completed 30 hours of community service, can she or he still receive the waiver?

Youth do not have to complete the community service requirement prior to receiving the tuition waiver. Once youth get into college, she or he must complete 30 hours of community service each year to continue to receive the tuition waiver.

Do youth have to volunteer at specific places, or can she or he focus on anything of interest?

The legislation asks that they find a way to volunteer with foster youth, but recognizes that not all communities have such opportunities. At this time, youth can complete the community service requirement in any area of interest. One way to do this is through joining Oregon Foster Youth Connection. Visit www.ORYouthConnection.org for more information.



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