



Richard Bland College

of WILLIAM & MARY

Request for Professional Judgement

Special Circumstances, Unusual Circumstances, and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determinations

This page will explain the Office of Student Financial Aid policies and procedures for unique situations such as special circumstances, unusual circumstances, and homeless youth determinations.

What are Special Circumstances?

“**Special circumstances**” refers to financial situations that may lead to a financial aid adjustment. This type of adjustment is called a Request for Professional Judgment.

Special circumstances could include one or more of the following:

- FAFSA information reported erroneously or omitted.
- Total loss of employment of either parent/stepparent for at least 10 weeks.
- Disability or death of a parent/stepparent.
- Parents’/stepparents’ divorce/remarriage or seperation.
- Change in your family/household size or a change in the number of college students in your family/household during the upcoming academic year.
- Extraordinary medical/dental or exceptionally high non-consumer expenses for which no reimbursement will be received, and which will require direct out-of-pocket payment(s).

What will not be considered for special circumstances:

- Aid offers from other colleges and universities, whether those offers are based on need or merit/honor.
- Discretionary spending patterns or chosen lifestyle of the parent(s) and/or student.
- Consumer indebtedness (past or present) of the family.

The Financial Aid Office may use professional judgment on a case-by-case basis to adjust a student's cost of attendance or the data used to calculate the students' Student Aid Index. The reason for the adjustment must be adequately documented and must be related to special circumstances that differentiate the student. If you meet one of the criteria listed in the approved list above, please contact your financial aid officer directly to discuss.

What are Unusual Circumstances?

"Unusual circumstances" refers to conditions that may lead to an adjustment to a student's dependency status based on a unique situation. This type of adjustment is called a Dependency Override. Unusual circumstances could include one or more of the following:

- Abusive family environment that threatens the student's health or safety
- Parental abandonment
- Parental incarceration
- Death of parent after filing the FAFSA when surviving parent meets one of the conditions above
- Human trafficking
- Refugee or asylee status

Circumstances that will not be considered:

- Parent refusal to provide information on the FAFSA

- Parent refusal to provide financial support
- Student being financially self-sufficient

The Financial Aid Office will review a student's supporting documentation. Supporting documentation must be adequate to substantiate a student's circumstances. Documentation may include, but is not limited to: submission of a court order or official Federal or State documentation that the student or student's parents or legal guardians are incarcerated; a documented phone call or written statement, which confirms the unusual circumstances with: a state, county or Tribal welfare agency; an independent living case worker who supports current and former foster youth with the transition to adulthood; a public or private agency, facility, or program servicing the victims of abuse, neglect, assault, or violence; or a documented phone call or written statement from an attorney, guardian ad litem, a court-appointed special advocate (or similar), or a representative of a TRIO or GEAR UP program which confirms the circumstances and the person's relationship to the student.

Starting with the 2024-25 Award Year, both initial and renewal applicants who indicate they have an unusual circumstance on their FAFSA form will submit their application under a provisional independent status. This will allow such applicants to receive a Student Aid Index (SAI) with an estimate of their Federal student aid eligibility, subject to a final determination by their school. Students will be notified and will be reviewed as soon as practicable once all documentation is received.

What is an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination?

An **"unaccompanied homeless youth determination"** is a category of independent students. It is the determination that a student 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; and
- Youth who are migrants and who qualify as experiencing homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

The Financial Aid Office will review an eligible authority’s documented determination or make its own determination that the student was an unaccompanied homeless youth, or at risk of being homeless, at any time on or after July 1st of the FAFSA base year (e.g., July 1, 2022, for the 2023-2024 FAFSA form). A student who is not yet 24 may qualify for a homeless youth determination. Homeless youth determinations are made on a case-by-case basis and without regard to the reasons that the student is unaccompanied and/or homeless. If you are an unaccompanied homeless youth and would like to request a determination, contact financialaid@rbc.edu

Please be aware of the following important information:

- Not every student who experiences special or unusual circumstances will be eligible for or benefit from a financial aid adjustment.

- If your FAFSA was selected for verification, this process must be completed before we can consider any special circumstances requests.
- A school is not permitted to make a professional judgment for a student after that student has ceased to be eligible, including when the student is no longer enrolled.
- The Office of Student's Financial Aid's decisions regarding these requests are final and cannot be appealed to the Department of Education.

Check your e-mail address regularly, as we will notify you via e-mail if we need any additional information. All requests for determination of independence, including dependency overrides and unaccompanied homeless youth determinations, will be reviewed as soon as practicable once all documentation is received.