

## General Information

The FAFSA identifies a student as “dependent” or “independent” based on certain criteria such as marital status, military status, financial support for children/other dependents, history of foster care/ward of the court, etc. However, the Department of Education understands that unusual circumstances may exist where a student may not be able to provide the information for their parent(s) on their FAFSA. In these situations, the Department of Education, with documentation, allows schools on a case-by-case-basis to review a student’s unusual circumstances to determine if they warrant a dependency override so that the student may be considered “independent” for Federal Student Aid purposes. This is what is referred to as a “Professional Judgement (PJ).”

Examples of unusual circumstances that may qualify for a Professional Judgement include:

- Parental abuse
- Parental abandonment
- Parental incarceration
- Human trafficking
- Legally granted refugee or asylum status

However, none of the situations below qualify as unusual circumstances:

- Parents refuse to contribute to the student’s education.
- Parents will not provide information for the FAFSA or verification
- Parents do not claim the student as a dependent for income tax purposes.
- The student demonstrates total self-sufficiency.

## Examples of Acceptable Documentation

The Department of Education requires that circumstances be documented to support the school’s decision. Examples of acceptable documentation include, but are not limited to the following:

- 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 transition to adulthood; or
  - Public or private agency, facility, or program servicing the victims of abuse, neglect, assault, or violence
- 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.
- A documented determination of independence made by a financial aid administrator at another institution in the same or a prior award year.
- Utility bills, health insurance, or other demonstrates a separation from parents or legal guardians.

## Review Process for Professional Judgement

To request a Professional Judgement for unusual circumstances, please complete and submit the form on the second page with the required documentation for review by the Director of Financial Aid. Once received, an interview will be conducted and documented by the Director of Financial Aid to review the student’s situation. Following the interview, a decision will be made and communicated to the student within 30 calendar days.

To request a Professional Judgement (PJ) for Unusual Circumstances, please follow the steps outlined in this form.

### Step 1: Student Information

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 2: Detailed Summary of Extenuating Circumstances

Please attach a typed and detailed summary of your extenuating circumstances that includes the following information:

- Detailed information regarding separation from parents, including the last contact the student had with the parent and their whereabouts.
- The student's living arrangements over the last years, including with whom the student has lived and who has provided financial support.
- Statement from the student explaining how he or she supported themselves.
  - Must include any earnings from work, cash support received, and/or in-kind support or money paid on their behalf.
  - Statement must include names and relationship of the person(s) providing the support

**Please note:** All attached statements must be signed and dated by hand. Statements submitted with typed or electronic signatures will not be accepted.

### Step 3: Supporting Documentation

The Department of Education requires that all Professional Judgements be supported by documentation. Please attach supporting documentation that corroborates the information detailed in your statement.

**Please note:** Any request submitted without documentation will not be reviewed.

### Step 4: Certification

By signing this form, I understand that all Professional Judgements will be reviewed and decided based on my statement and corroborating documentation on a case-by-case basis. I understand that the decision made by the Office of Financial Aid is final and cannot be appealed to the Department of Education.

**Please note:** Forms must be signed and dated by hand. Forms submitted with typed or electronic signatures will not be accepted.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

This section is to be completed by the Office of Financial Aid.

**Professional Judgement Review**

Date Request Received: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Interview Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Professional Judgement Decision</b>	
Approved <input type="checkbox"/>	Denied <input type="checkbox"/>

Summary of Decision: \_\_\_\_\_

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Director of Financial Aid Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Director of Financial Aid