



# 50-STATE REVIEW



**FOCUS IN.**  
Study up  
on important  
education policies.

## Tuition Assistance Programs for Foster Youth Pursuing Postsecondary Education

EMILY PARKER AND MOLLY SARUBBI

Many students have concerns about the affordability of college, which may interfere with their potential success. However, foster care alumni have unique needs when making the transition into postsecondary enrollment. Compared to completion rates

graduation rates than their non-foster peers – 46 percent compared to 82.3 percent.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these perpetual educational inequities, it is important to consider policies aimed at addressing disparate postsecondary access and attainment rates.

**TWENTY-EIGHT STATES OFFER SOME TYPE OF STATE-LEVEL TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH SEEKING A POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL. TWENTY STATES UTILIZE TUITION WAIVERS AND EIGHT STATES OFFER GRANTS OR SCHOLARSHIPS.**

for the general population, postsecondary education outcomes for youth with foster care experience lag behind.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 60 percent of the general population will obtain a bachelor's degree, compared with only 3 percent of foster care alumni.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, foster care alumni have lower high school

A 2016 Education Commission of the States special report, **Strengthening Policies for Foster Youth Postsecondary Attainment**, reviews how state policies can increase higher education access for foster youth and highlights states' autonomy to develop initiatives to best support this population. In an effort to provide ongoing support for state policymakers and education leaders, this 50-State Review expands on the mentioned report to focus specifically on state-based tuition assistance programs for foster youth. This comparison of various state tuition assistance programs can serve as a tool to better understand the supports for this vulnerable student population and provide a guidepost for possible policy redesign.

Of the 28 states with tuition assistance programs, **all but five** states – Maine, Michigan, New York, Virginia and West Virginia – **include an upper-age limit** in the **eligibility requirements** for state-level tuition assistance programs for former foster youth.

**Six states** provide **financial assistance** beyond **tuition** and **mandatory fees**. This additional support can include books, supplies, room and board, and transportation expenses.

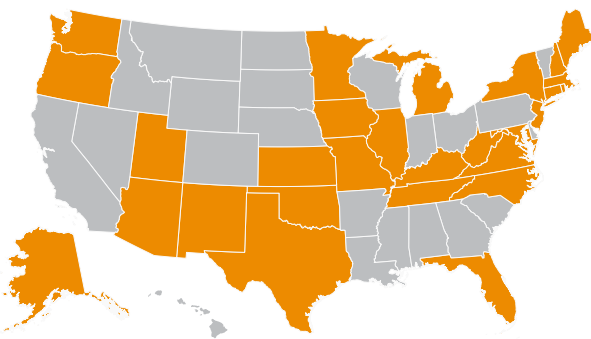
# Overview of Tuition Assistance Programs

State-based tuition assistance programs are not the only policies in place to help foster youth attain a postsecondary credential. Additional federal, state and institution-level policies exist that intentionally target foster youth.

**State-based** tuition assistance programs act as a form of **stability aid**, creating an **additional layer** of financial support not always met by larger national funding streams.

This support can be integral in the postsecondary access and persistence for underrepresented student populations. In 2003, tuition assistance programs geared specifically for foster youth began to appear, however, a recent scan of the national legislature confirms that to date, 28 states have some form of tuition assistance for foster youth.

The most common policy design is for states or institutions to award a tuition waiver to former foster youth. There are 20 state-level tuition waivers for former foster youth and eight grants or scholarships. The map below indicates which states have state-level tuition assistance programs.



## Eligibility Criteria


Although no two tuition assistance programs are identical across states, some common requirements exist. For example, students must submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), maintain satisfactory

academic performance to be eligible for and to maintain the award, and use the tuition assistance at a public community college or four-year institution. However, when digging into the specific eligibility requirements of each program, the details often vary significantly from state to state.


Eligibility requirements for tuition assistance programs vary in a number of ways including upper-age limits for program participation, the age or amount of time when the student was in foster care, what the tuition assistance includes and/or covers, and limitations on the amount of funding or the number of awards. Additionally, some programs further constrict student eligibility through more stringent criteria, such as personal financial requirements or additional forms or scholarship applications.

### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA


#### COMMON REQUIREMENTS



**Submit the FAFSA**



**Use tuition assistance at an eligible institution**



**Maintain satisfactory academic performance**

#### ADDITIONAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Age limits for program participation
- Amount of time student was in foster care
- What the tuition includes/covers
- Amount of funding/number of awards
- Personal financial requirements
- Additional scholarship applications



The following state examples show the range of support that state-level tuition assistance can provide.

### Oregon

The **Oregon** tuition waiver for foster youth and former foster youth covers tuition and required fees remaining after funds from the Pell Grant, the Oregon Opportunity Grant and other institutional aid have been applied at any Oregon public institution. Students must have spent at least six months in the foster care system between the ages of 14 and 21 to meet eligibility requirements. The Oregon program, in addition to the academic and financial requirements, also requires recipients to perform 30 hours of community service each academic year.<sup>4</sup> These stringent requirements to access the Oregon tuition waiver result in very few students actually applying for and receiving the tuition waiver. Because Oregon has other, less rigorous financial aid programs, such as the Oregon Opportunity Grant, the remaining costs at a public institution may not justify the community service requirement. When designing tuition assistance programs for foster youth, states should consider the whole financial aid landscape in their state to best identify unmet need and not duplicate efforts.

### Connecticut

**Connecticut** has two separate programs for former foster youth – one for students adopted from foster care and one for students in foster care on their 18th birthday. The combination of these two programs cover much of the foster care spectrum, but exclude students who were in foster care, but were reunited with their birth family prior to their 18th birthday. However, the tuition assistance program for students in foster care on their 18th birthday (and not adopted or reunited with their birth family) has an application requirement that can be restrictive to

foster youth. According to state policy, applicants must “exhibit adequate social skills and demonstrate appropriate behavior, as assessed by the adolescent Social Worker and the case history.”<sup>5</sup>

### Iowa

The **Iowa** tuition assistance program differs from that of Oregon and Connecticut because it is a grant and not a tuition waiver, and allows the state to cover the full cost of attendance, not just tuition and required fees. While most tuition assistance programs cover only tuition and mandatory fees, the All Iowa Opportunity Foster Care Grant is an example of one of the six states nationally that provide support beyond the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. Iowa covers the cost of tuition, fees, books and supplies, dorms and off-campus housing, meal plans, transportation and personal living expenses. This program provides a generous benefit to students, eliminating many of the financial barriers that foster youth face when seeking a postsecondary credential. In order to apply, students must submit both the FAFSA and the Iowa Financial Aid Application.

## Tuition Assistance Programs by State

The following chart lists each of the 28 states with state-level tuition assistance programs for foster youth. It also details the age by which students must take advantage of the tuition assistance program, the requirement for the duration of their time in care, the financial support provided by the program, the number of credit hours required to qualify for the tuition assistance, and additional details about the program. [This interactive data visualization](#) provides an in-depth look at the tuition assistance programs and the number of youth in care.



## Tuition Assistance Programs by State

State	Name of Program	Age Limit	Foster Care Requirement	Financial Support	Enrollment Requirement	Additional Notes
<b>Alaska</b>	University of Alaska Presidential Foster Youth Tuition Waiver <b>CCS HB 302</b>	21	In care after 16th birthday	Tuition		Must apply for two additional scholarships Capped at 20 scholarships per year
<b>Arizona</b>	Arizona Tuition Waiver for those formerly in foster care <b>§ 15-1809</b>	23	In care after 16th birthday	Tuition and mandatory fees		5-year pilot program started in 2015 Total personal assets must be less than \$10,000
<b>Connecticut</b>	College Assistance/ Postsecondary Education Assistance for Adopted Children Tuition Waiver <b>Policy Manual: Post Adoption Services Chapter 48-20-2</b>	Apply by 21, receive funding until 23	Adopted before 18th birthday and after Dec. 31, 2004	Tuition, fees, and room and board equivalent to the cost of tuition, fees, and room and board at the University of Connecticut Storrs Campus		\$500 personal contribution per year
	Post-Secondary Education Program Tuition Waiver <b>Policy 42-20-20</b>	23 Must enroll immediately following high school completion	In care on 18th birthday	Tuition, fees, room and board (on campus), and/or off campus stipend, books, equipment, supplies and materials	Full-time only	Must “exhibit adequate social skills and demonstrate appropriate behavior, as assessed by the adolescent Social Worker”
<b>Florida</b>	Tuition and Fee Exemption Tuition Waiver <b>West’s F.S.A. § 1009.25</b>	28	Under 18 and in care, over 18 and in care on 18th birthday, spent six months in care after 16, or adopted after May 5, 1997	Tuition and fees	Full-time only	Capped at 54 FTE students or 1 percent of the institution’s total FTE enrollment, whichever is greater, at each institution
<b>Illinois</b>	Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Scholarship Program <b>89 Ill. Adm. Code 312.100</b>	23	Currently in care, aged out of care at 18, in care immediately before being adopted or in the KinGap program	Tuition and fees	12-credit hour minimum	Maximum of 48 scholarships each year, four of which are awarded to children of veterans
<b>Iowa</b>	All Iowa Opportunity Foster Care Grant <b>I.C.A. § 261.6</b>	Enrolled by 23, receive funding until 24	Aged out at 18, but in care at 18 or legally adopted after 16	Tuition, fees, books and supplies, dorms or off-campus housing, meal plans, transportation and personal living expenses	Full-time or Part-time Prorated to reflect the number of hours	Grant amounts up to \$9,010 per year Must submit Iowa Financial Aid Application



State	Name of Program	Age Limit	Foster Care Requirement	Financial Support	Enrollment Requirement	Additional Notes
Kansas	Kansas Foster Child Educational Assistance Tuition Waiver Program <b>Kansas 2016 statute 75-53,112</b>	23	In care on 18th birthday, graduated high school while in care, adopted after 16th birthday, left care after 16th birthday	Tuition, fees, option for additional expenses if funding allows		
Kentucky	Kentucky Foster or Adopted Children Tuition Waiver Program <b>KRS § 164.2847</b>	Must enroll up to four years after high school graduation	Currently in care, in care at 18, adopted from state foster care (adopted by a family who receives state adoption assistance or participating in a state-funded independent living program)	Tuition and mandatory fees	Full-time or Part-time	
Maine	Post-Secondary Education Tuition Waiver <b>20-A M.R.S.A. § 12572</b>	No age limit	In care or adopted from care at time of high school graduation	Tuition only	Full-time only	Submit an application form to the Finance Authority of Maine  Capped at 30 new students per year
Maryland	Tuition Waiver for Foster Care Recipients <b>§15-106.</b>	Enroll by 25	In care on 18th birthday, in care on 13th birthday and placed into guardianship, adopted after 13th birthday, or be the younger sibling of a student who fits qualification 1 or 2.	Tuition and mandatory fees	Full-time or Part-time	
Massachusetts	<b>Department of Children and Families Adopted Child Tuition Waiver and Fee Assistance Program</b>	24	Adopted by an eligible Massachusetts state employee or by an eligible Massachusetts resident through the DCF	Tuition and fees	Full-time or Part-time	
	<b>DCF Foster Child Tuition Waiver and Fee Assistance Program</b>	24	In care at least six months before 18, not have been adopted or returned home	Tuition and fees		
Michigan	Fostering Futures Scholarship <b>M.C.L.A. 722.1021 through 722.1031</b>	No age limit	In care on or after 13th birthday	Tuition, fees, room and board, books, supplies and equipment	Full-time or Part-time	
Minnesota	MNSCU Tuition Waiver for Persons Under the Guardianship of the Commissioner of Human Services <b>Procedure 5.12.2 Tuition Waivers, Deferrals, and Retroactive Drops</b>	21	Currently under the guardianship of the commissioner of human services	Tuition		Decentralized. Up to the president of each college or university  Must contribute toward their expenses by gainful employment if able to work



State	Name of Program	Age Limit	Foster Care Requirement	Financial Support	Enrollment Requirement	Additional Notes
Missouri	Missouri Reach Tuition Waiver <a href="#">V.A.M.S. 173.270.1</a>	Must apply by the third anniversary of discharge date, graduated high school, obtained GED or 21st birthday	In care before 18th birthday or when -graduated high school	Tuition and fees		Students must apply to the coordinating board for higher education for a determination of eligibility  100 hrs of community service/internship each year of award
New Hampshire	Tuition Waiver for Children in State Foster Care or Guardianship <a href="#">§ 187-A:20-b</a>	Less than 23	In care for the immediate six-month period prior to 18th birthday, in care at the time of 18th birthday, adopted while in care or in an out-of-home placement at time of 17th birthday	Tuition only  NH offers additional room/board scholarship independent of tuition waiver	Full-time only  12 credit minimum	Capped at 10 tuition waivers for the NH University System and 10 waivers for the Community College System
New Jersey	<a href="#">New Jersey Foster Care (NJFC) Scholars Program</a>	16-23 years	In care nine months before 16, living in transitional housing	Tuition and fees only	Full-time only	
New Mexico	Foster child tuition and fee waiver eligibility; notification <a href="#">N. M. S. A. 1978, § 21-1-4.7</a>	25	In care (including legal custody of NM Indian nation) between 14-1, or when graduated high school /obtained GED	Tuition and limited fees only		
New York	Foster Youth College Success Initiative <a href="#">McKinney's Education Law § 6456</a>	No upper-age limit	In care by 18, any time after 13th birthday	Tuition, fees, books, transportation, housing, summer college prep, including advising, tutoring and academic assistance		
North Carolina	North Carolina Foster Youth Tuition Waiver <a href="#">N.C.G.S.A. § 115B-2</a>	24	Ward of the state by 18 and eligible for North Carolina Education and Training Voucher	Tuition		
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Successful Adulthood (OKSA) program <a href="#">340:75-6-110</a>	26 Must apply within three years of high school graduation	In care at least nine months between ages 16-18	Tuition only		
Oregon	Free College Tuition for Former Foster Youth <a href="#">ORS 350.300</a>	25	Spent six months in foster care between ages 14-21, enroll in program within three years of leaving care or graduating high school, whichever comes first	Tuition and fees only		30 hours of community service each academic year



State	Name of Program	Age Limit	Foster Care Requirement	Financial Support	Enrollment Requirement	Additional Notes
Rhode Island	Higher Education Opportunity Grant <b>RI § 42-72.8-2</b>	Enroll by 21, receive funding through 23	In care before 18th birthday, for at least 24 months or in care between 16-18	Supplements federal, state and institutional scholarships, grants and loans	Full-time only	
Tennessee	Tennessee HOPE Foster Child Tuition Grant <b>T. C. A. § 49-4-933</b>	Four years after high school graduation, six years after admittance to an eligible institution	In care for at least one year after 14th birthday, adopted after 14 or was placed in permanent care after 14th birthday	Cost of attendance less other gift aid, not to exceed tuition and fees		
Texas	College Tuition and Fee Waiver <b>V.T.C.A., Education Code § 54.367</b>	25	In care between 14-18, adopted on or after Sept. 1, 2009, age 14 and reunified after June 1, 2016, in care and had dual enrollment in high school and higher education	Tuition and fees		
Utah	Tuition Waivers for Children in Long-Term Foster Care <b>U.C.A. 1953 § 53B-8d-103</b>	22	Aggregate time in care of at least 24 months	Tuition	Full-time or Part-time	
Virginia	Comprehensive community colleges (grants for tuition and fees for certain individuals) <b>VA Code Ann. § 23.1-601</b>	No age limit	In care at 18 and receive high school diploma	Tuition and fees	Full-time or Part-time Minimum six credits per semester	Community colleges only
Washington	Passport To College Tuition Waiver Program <b>RCWA 28B.117.030</b>	26	Aged out of system after 2007, spent one year in care after 16	Tuition and fees of highest-priced state institution and not surpass need	Full-time or Part-time	
West Virginia	West Virginia Tuition Waiver <b>§ 18B-10-7b</b>	No age limit	In state care at least one year prior to waiver award	Tuition and fees	Full-time or Part-time Prorated based on number of hours	



## Final Thoughts

Both federal and state-level policymakers have paid varying levels of attention to the broad issue of postsecondary degree attainment, and foster youth have benefited from federal and state policy development. While states have taken direct initiative in investing resources toward increasing the postsecondary degree attainment rate for foster youth, there is a lack of consistency across those levers of support. Complex and extensive eligibility criteria narrow the window of foster youth applicants and can limit the reach of well-intentioned policies.

Through a realignment of **broader and more inclusive program design**, state policymakers can have greater ability to **increase postsecondary pathways and attainment** for this important population.

## AUTHORS

*Emily Parker is a policy analyst with Education Commission of the States. Emily loves data, charts and board games. When she's not researching school finance policy, Emily is a pub trivia host in Denver. She has her Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Denver and can be reached at [eparker@ecs.org](mailto:eparker@ecs.org) or 303.299.3662.*

*Molly Sarubbi is a policy researcher with Education Commission of the States. She earned her Master of Higher Education from the University of Rochester and is completing her PhD at the University of Denver. When she's not trying to change the world through policy, research and advocacy, she enjoys channeling her creative talents through various art and music outlets. Molly can be reached at [msarubbi@ecs.org](mailto:msarubbi@ecs.org) or 303.299.3606.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Liliana Hernandez et al., *Increasing College Access and Retention of Foster Care Youth: A Review of Tuition Waiver Programs*, (Wayne State: Center for Social Work Research, 2017), 6, [http://www.tipwaynestate.org/uploads/1/3/8/9/13898085/tuition\\_waiver\\_policy\\_brief\\_updated\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.tipwaynestate.org/uploads/1/3/8/9/13898085/tuition_waiver_policy_brief_updated_2_.pdf)
2. Burt S. Barnow et al., "Effective Services for Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for Children and Alumni of Foster Care Service: Correlates and Educational and Employment Outcomes," *Child & Family Social Work* (2013): 159.
3. U.S. Department of Education, "U.S. High school Graduate Rate Hits New Record High," U.S. Department of Education, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-high-school-graduation-rate-hits-new-record-high-0> (accessed February 3, 2017).
4. Oregon Revised Statutes 350.300, 2017, [https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills\\_laws/ors/ors350.html](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/ors/ors350.html).
5. Connecticut Policy 42-20-20, Post-Secondary School Education Expenses, 2012, 1-13, <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/policy/pdf/42-20-20.pdf>.