

Professional Judgment (PJ) Information

The FAFSA Simplification Act (the Act) distinguishes between different categories of professional judgment by amending section 479A of the HEA.

- **Special Circumstances** refer to the financial situations (loss of a job, etc.) that justify an aid administrator adjusting data elements in the COA or in the EFC calculation.
- **Unusual Circumstances** refer to the conditions that justify an aid administrator making an adjustment to a student's dependency status based on a unique situation (e.g., human trafficking, refugee or asylee status, parental abuse or abandonment, incarceration), more commonly referred to as a dependency override.

A student may have both a special circumstance and an unusual circumstance. Financial aid administrators (FAAs) may make adjustments that are appropriate to each student's situation with appropriate documentation.

Special Circumstances -

An aid administrator may use PJ on a case-by-case basis to adjust the student's cost of attendance or the data used to calculate his or her EFC. This adjustment is valid only at the school making the change.

The law gives some examples of special circumstances that MAY be considered (HEA Sec. 479A):

- Change in employment status, income, or assets Change in housing status (e.g., homelessness)
- Tuition expenses at an elementary or secondary school
- Medical, dental, or nursing home expenses not covered by insurance
- Child or dependent care expenses
- Severe disability of the student or other member of the student's household
- Other changes or adjustments that impact the student's costs or ability to pay for college.

Unusual Circumstances (Dependency Overrides) -

Under HEA Sec. 480(d)(9), the FAFSA Simplification Act incorporated additional unusual circumstances to consider when a student is unable to contact a parent or where contact with parents poses a risk to such student.

Unusual circumstances do include:

- Human trafficking, as described in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (22 U.S.C. 7101 et seq.);
- Legally granted refugee or asylum status;
- Parental abandonment or estrangement; or
- Student or parental incarceration.

In such cases an override might be warranted based upon the student's individual circumstances. These conditions would also not disqualify a student from being a homeless unaccompanied youth or self-supporting and at risk of homelessness.

However, none of the conditions listed below, singly or in combination, qualify as unusual circumstances meriting a dependency override.

Unusual circumstances do not include:

- 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.
- Student demonstrates total self-sufficiency.

Please see the Financial Aid Coordinator at the campus you attend or plan to attend for more information regarding the documentation needed if you desire to request a PJ determination based on your or your families unique situation.

PJ determinations are conducted on a case-by-case basis. All PJ requests are reviewed and considered, but approval is not guaranteed and not always warranted.