

Unusual Circumstance (Dependency Override): Who qualifies?

Many students assume that because they are not living with their parents, are responsible for their own expenses, and are not claimed on their parents' income tax returns, they should qualify for financial aid programs as an independent student. However, Congress' definition of independence is not that simple. The Federal Government has established the guidelines below that determine which students are considered independent for financial aid purposes and which are not. This document explains these guidelines and will help you determine if you will be considered independent when applying for federal financial aid.

Independent Student Definition: To be considered an independent student in the academic year of 2026-2027, you must meet at least **ONE** of the following conditions:

- At least 24 years old
- Married
- Graduate or professional student
- Veteran of U.S. Armed Forces or Active Duty
- Has children or dependents (other than a spouse) who receive more than half of their support from you
- Orphan, foster child or ward of the court
- Emancipated minor
- Unaccompanied homeless youth
- Determined to be "independent" by financial aid administrator based on *unusual* circumstances

Proof of Eligibility:

Even if you meet one of these eight conditions, you may be asked to provide supporting documentation such as your birth certificate, or a copy of your armed forces discharge (DD214).

Inability to Document Independent Status:

If you apply for financial aid as an independent student but do not meet all of the federal guidelines, you will be considered a dependent applicant and be required to correct the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You will be required to provide your parents' information in order to determine your eligibility for financial aid as a dependent student. Correcting your dependency status may result in a change in your award notice.

Appeal of Dependency Status:

Lake Region State College Financial Aid Office is required to follow federal government guidelines in determining a student's dependency status. The Financial Aid Office acknowledges, however, that parental estrangement is a reality for some students. If you have experienced the following you may petition for independent status.

- Parental abandonment, incarcerations, etc.
- Unable to contact parents
- Contact with parents poses risk
- Human trafficking
- Refugee or asylee status

You will be asked to explain your circumstance in writing and provide evidence for your claim. Our office will review your dependency status and determine whether you can be considered independent based on a professional judgment exception.

The following situations are not valid in themselves to claim independency:

- ❖ You do not reside with your parents.
- ❖ Your parents refuse to pay your college education.
- ❖ Your parents are not financially able to pay for your education.
- ❖ You were married after you applied for financial aid.
- ❖ You do not want your parents' assistance and have decided to pay for your own college education

Please note: Appealing for independent status is a procedure that takes time and may delay the timely packaging of your financial aid; it is a process that should be considered only in cases of extenuating circumstances.

If you would like your dependency status to be reviewed, you must submit a Letter of Dependency Appeal to LRSC financial aid office, which explains the reason(s) why you should be considered independent. Include in the letter the location of both parents and the last time you had contacted with each parent. You must include a third-party letter (e.g., a statement written on letterhead from a social worker, counselor, principal, doctor, lawyer, or clergy) to support the reason(s) listed in your letter. All information regarding your letter, third-party letter and supporting documentations such as your income information etc. will remain confidential. Once the necessary information has been received, your appeal will be reviewed, and you will be notified.

If you have any questions regarding your status, please schedule an appointment with a financial aid advisor or contact the Office of Financial Aid at:

kelsey.walters@lrsc.edu

Phone: (701) 662-1517 or 1-800-443-1313, ext. 1517

Fax: (701)662-1666