

Understanding Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determinations and Policies

Caleb McKay



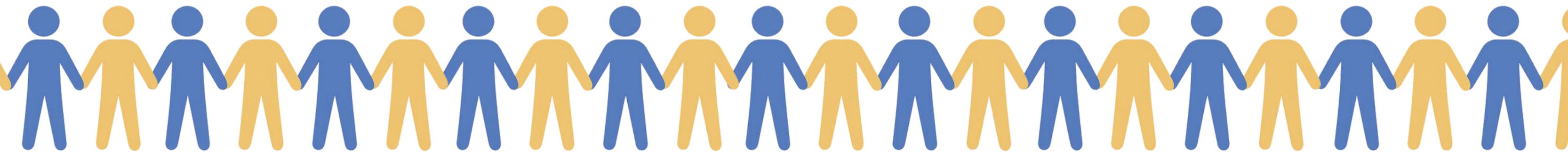
**Annual Conference
March 11 - 13, 2026**



SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness, from prenatal to postsecondary, through strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with youth, families, schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, and service providers.

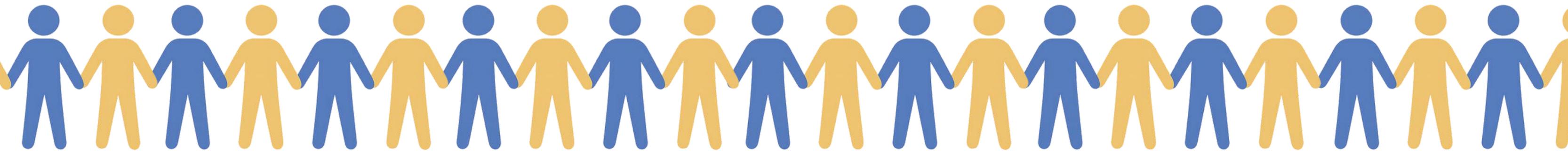
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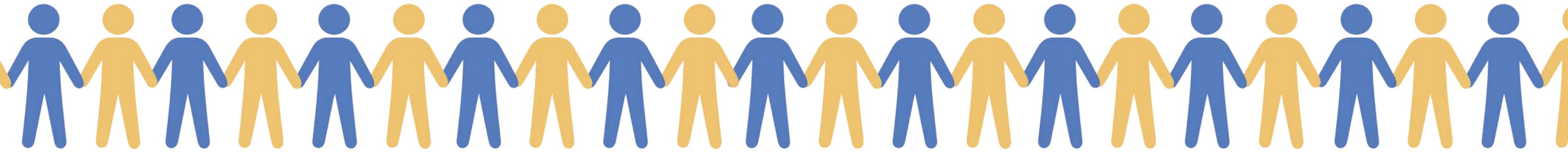


Agenda

- Terms and Definitions
- UHY FAFSA Process
- UHY Documentation
- UHY Policies
- Best Practices and Resources



Terms and Definitions



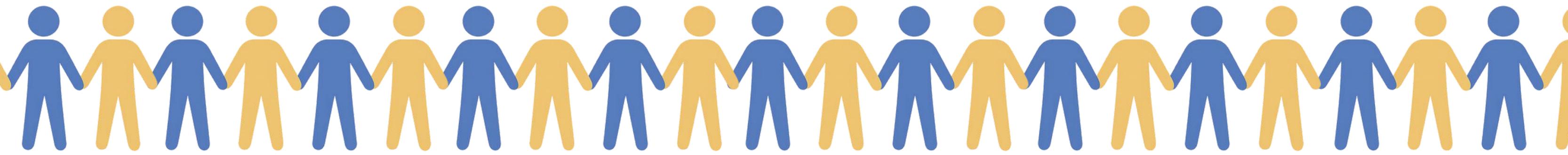
Federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Definitions:

Unaccompanied and Homeless

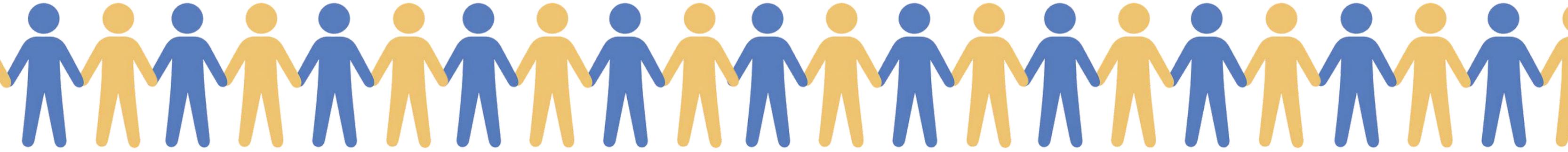
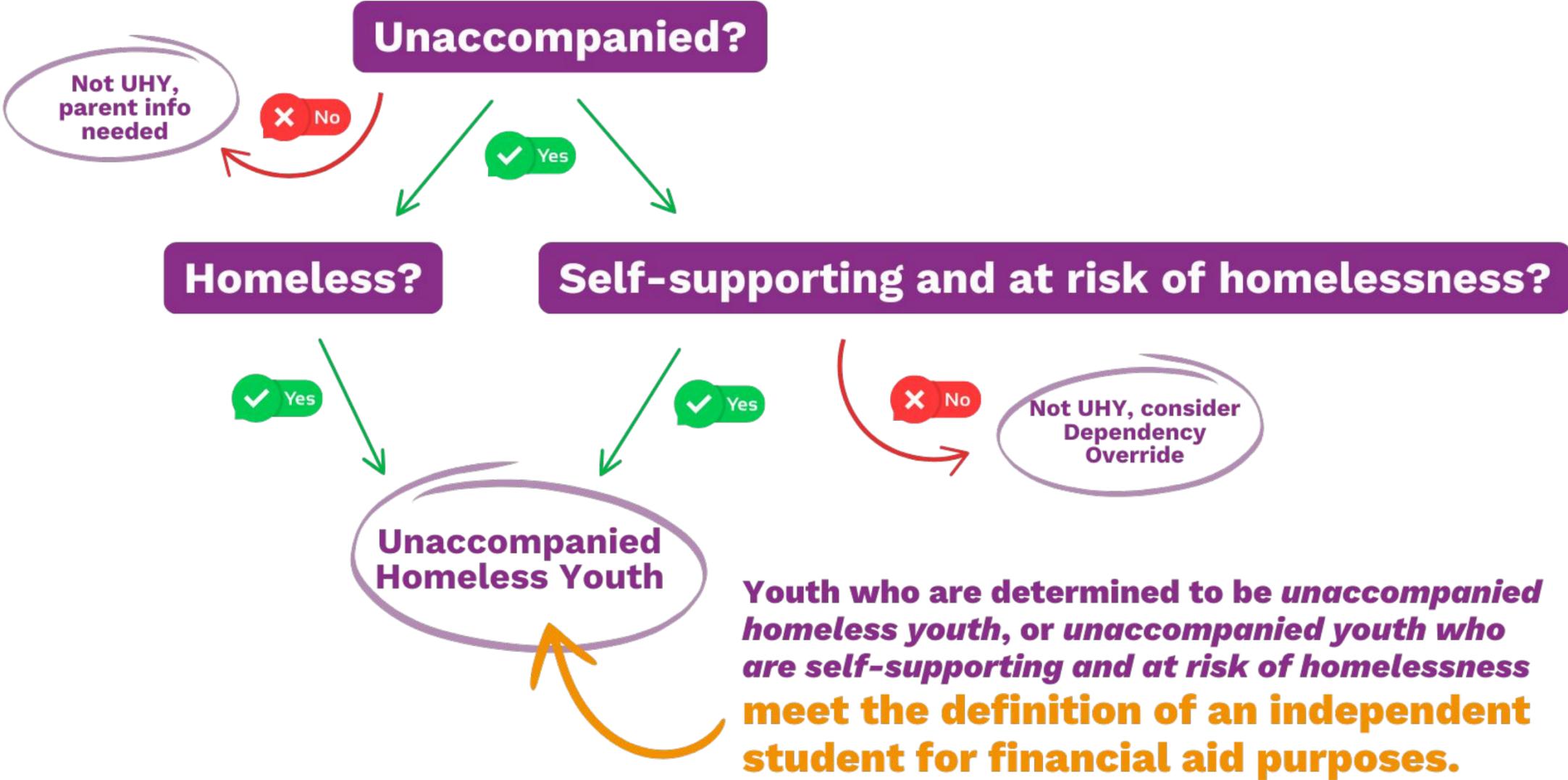
- **Unaccompanied:** Not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian
- **Homeless:** Lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

Unaccompanied, Self-Supporting and At Risk of Homelessness

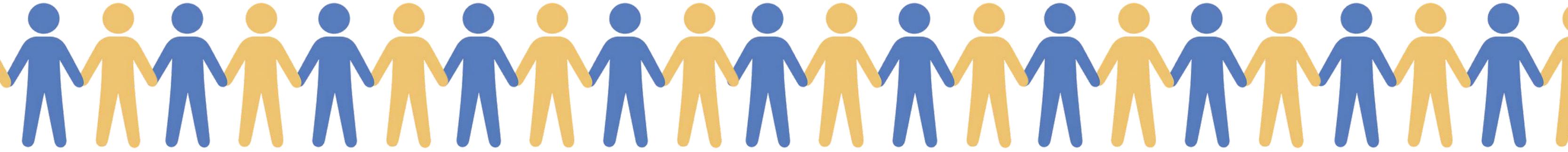
- **Unaccompanied:** Not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian
- **Self-Supporting:** Pays for their own expenses, including housing
- **At Risk of Homelessness:** Housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate



UHY Determination Flowchart



UHY FAFSA Process



UHY FAFSA Question and Authorized Entities

Student Homelessness

At any time on or after July 1, 2025, was the student unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

Yes No

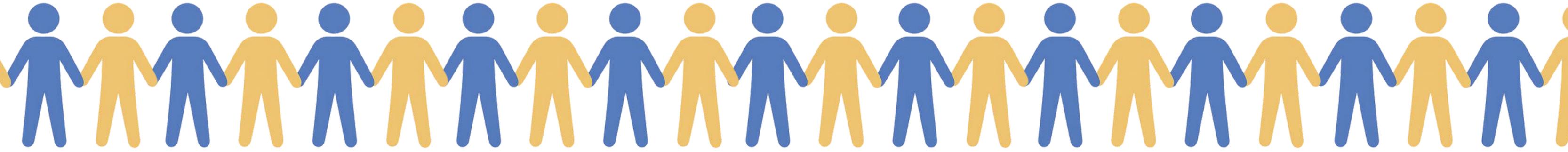
Did any of the following determine the student was homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?

Select all that apply or "None of these apply."

- Director or designee of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other program serving those experiencing homelessness
- The student's high school or school district homeless liaison or designee
- Director or designee of a project supported by a federal TRIO or GEAR UP program grant
- Financial aid administrator
- None of these apply.

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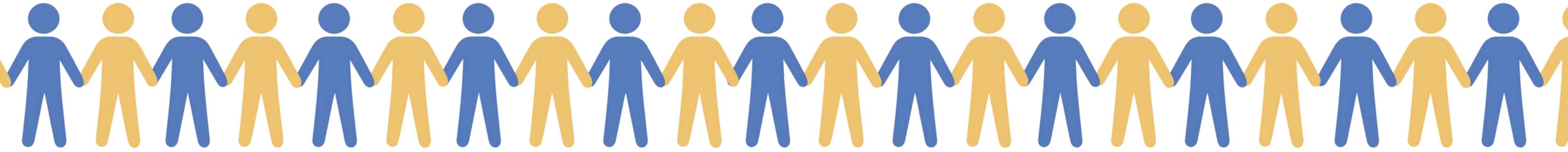
Your Dependency Status



Independent Student
Based on your answers, you're an independent student. This means you don't need to answer financial questions about your parents to complete your FAFSA® form.

Previous

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Bumper Screen - UHY, No Authority Selected

Your Dependency Status



Provisionally Independent Student or **Unaccompanied Homeless Youth**

You Can Proceed Without Parent Information

Based on your answers, you can submit your application without answering questions about your parent(s).

To complete the financial aid process, you'll need to contact the financial aid office at the college or career school you wish to attend.

If you are not in contact with a parent or contacting a parent would pose a risk to you, you are considered a provisionally independent student. You will need to speak with the financial aid office at your school about your circumstances.

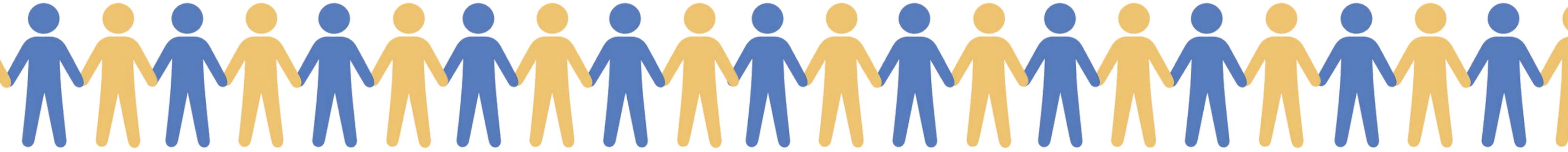
If you have indicated that you are unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless, the financial aid office at your school is required to make a determination of your status based on a written statement from you or a documented interview with you. Contact your school's financial aid office to complete this process.

We can't make an accurate calculation of your federal student aid eligibility until you discuss this with your financial aid office. Until then, we will provide only an estimate of your federal student aid eligibility as an independent student.



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Student Unusual Circumstances

This information will help us evaluate the student's ability to pay for school.

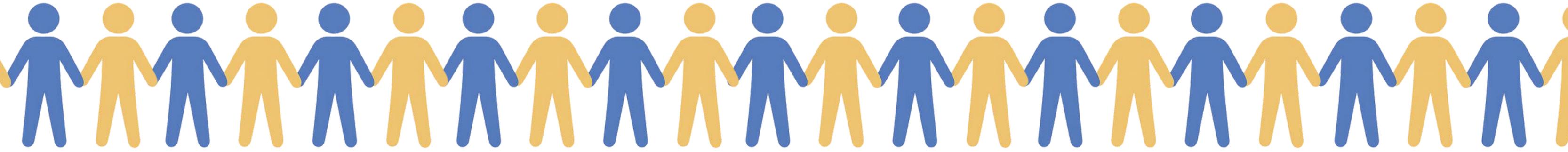
Do unusual circumstances prevent the student from contacting their parents or would contacting their parents pose a risk to the student?

- A student may be experiencing unusual circumstances if they*
- left home due to an abusive or threatening environment;*
 - are abandoned by or estranged from their parents;*
 - have refugee or asylee status and are separated from their parents, or their parents are displaced in a foreign country;*
 - are a victim of human trafficking;*
 - are incarcerated, or their parents are incarcerated, and contact with the parents would pose a risk to the student; or*
 - are otherwise unable to contact or locate their parents.*

If the student's circumstances resulted in not having a safe and stable place to live, they may be considered a homeless youth and should review the answer to the previous question about being unaccompanied and homeless.

Yes No

Unusual Circumstances Question



Bumper Screen - Unusual Circumstances

Your Dependency Status



Provisionally Independent Student or Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

You Can Proceed Without Parent Information

Based on your answers, you can submit your application without answering questions about your parent(s).

To complete the financial aid process, you'll need to contact the financial aid office at the college or career school you wish to attend.

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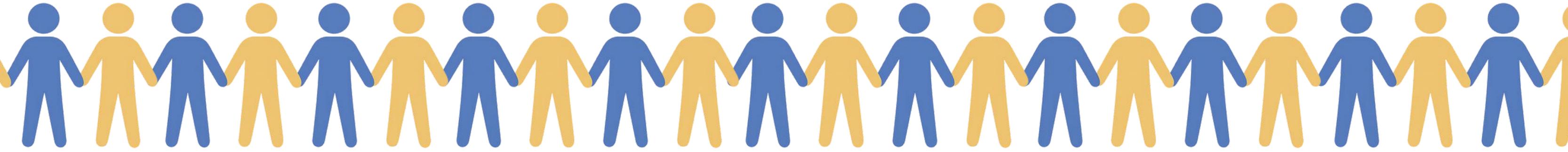
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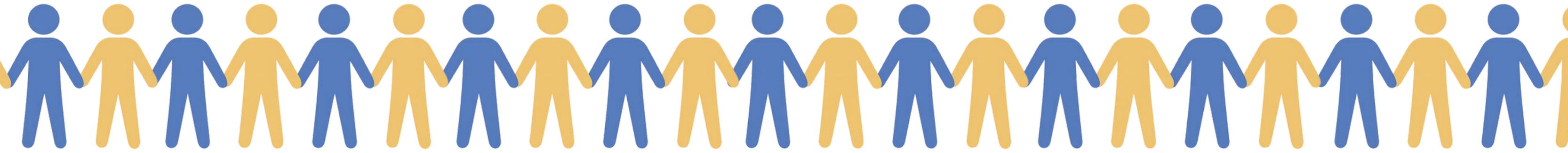


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UHY Documentation



Documentation: Authority Selected

Documentation from an authorized entity may include:

- Documented phone call
- Written statement
 - ex: determination form template
- Verifiable electronic match

Independent Student Status of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination for the 2026-2027 FAFSA¹

Student's Name:
 Student's SSN [optional]:
 Student's DOB:
 Student's Mailing Address*:
 *If the student does not have a stable address, you may list the name, phone number and mailing address of a friend or relative, or the school]

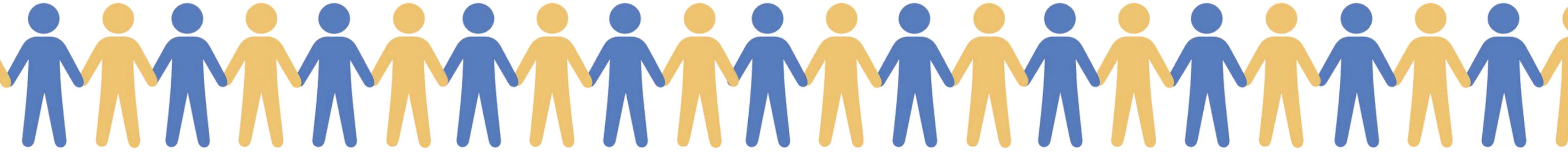
To Whom It May Concern:
 This form conveys my determination that after July 1, 2025, this student was:
 an unaccompanied homeless youth, as defined by the FAFSA Simplification Act (Public Law No: 116-260).
 an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness.

Under the FAFSA Simplification Act (Public Law No: 116-260), I am authorized to document this student's living situation and determine his/her independent student status as an unaccompanied homeless youth, or an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness. Financial aid administrators must accept this documentation, unless there is specific documented conflicting information. Please address any questions to me at the number or e-mail address listed below.

Signature:	Date:
Print Name:	Phone:
Email:	
Title:	
Agency:	
Role (Check One): <input type="checkbox"/> School district homeless liaison, or designee of the liaison. <i>If you are the designee of the liaison, please list the name of your school district liaison here:</i> _____	

¹ This form is applicable for institutions that are requesting documentation from students who are enrolling in college for the 2026-27 award year who were not previously determined to be an unaccompanied homeless youth, or an unaccompanied youth who is self-supporting and at risk of homelessness. Students who were determined to be unaccompanied homeless youth, or at unaccompanied youth who is self-supporting, and at risk of homelessness, in the prior award year are presumed to be independent for each subsequent year at the same institution, unless the student informs the institution that circumstances have changed, or the institution has specific conflicting information about the student's independence, and has informed the student of this information.

Sample form for UHY determinations



Documentation: No Authority Selected

Financial Aid Administrator must make the determination based on:

- Documented interview with student, or
- Written statement from student

Made without regard to reason why a student is unaccompanied and homeless. (Section 479D(a)(2) of HEA)

Dear Financial Aid Administrator,

This written statement conveys that after July 1, **[INSERT YEAR]**, **[INSERT NAME OF STUDENT]** was:

an unaccompanied homeless youth, as defined by the FAFSA Simplification Act (Public Law No: 116-260).

an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness.

Student's SSN [optional]:
 Student's DOB:
 I am currently residing in:

On-campus housing (but would otherwise have no place to stay)

Motel

Car

Campsite

Shelter or other temporary housing program

Substandard housing (housing that is insufficient to meet the physical and psychological needs typically met in a home environment)

Temporarily staying with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason

Under the FAFSA Simplification Act, which is summarized in ED's July 2024 [guidance](#) on unaccompanied homeless youth, FAAs must make a case-by-case decision that is:

- Based upon a written statement from, or a documented interview with the student that confirms that they are an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting; and
- Made *without regard* to the reasons that the student is unaccompanied and/or homeless

ACTION TAKEN - FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATOR FILL OUT

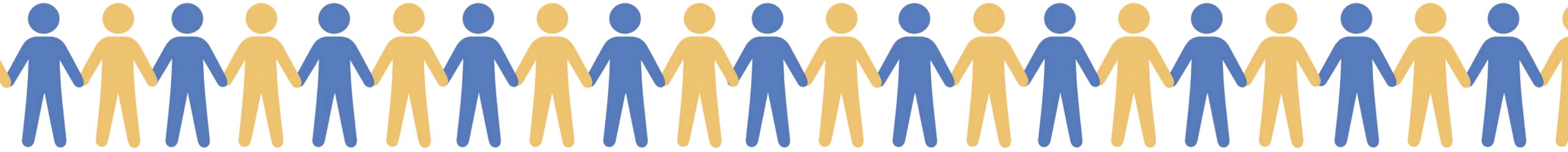
Independent student status as an unaccompanied homeless youth or a youth who is unaccompanied and self-supporting and risk of homelessness CONFIRMED

Independent student status NOT CONFIRMED. Please explain and include next steps for assisting student with the FAFSA:

Print Name: _____ Title: _____

Signature (REQUIRED): _____ Date: _____

UHY Written Statement Template for FAAs



UHY ≠ Dependency Override

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

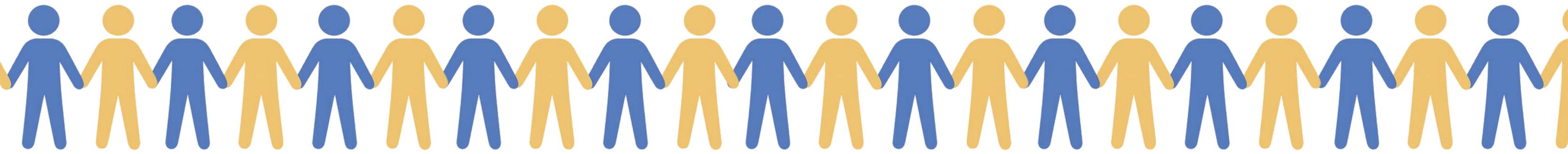
- Documentation:
 - Either a determination from an authorized entity or a statement from the student (written statement or documented phone call)
 - No further documentation needed
- Relationship with parents not required to make determinations

Dependency Override

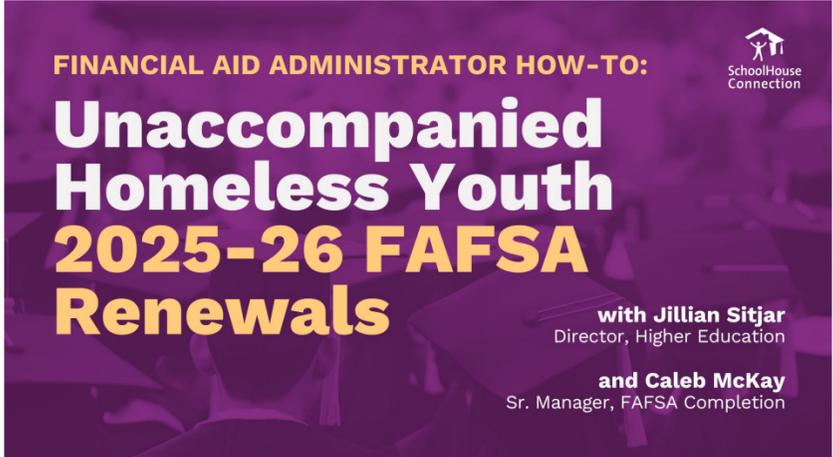
- Documentation:
 - Per institutional policy
 - Typically includes third-party letters and statements, wet signatures, letterhead, etc.
- May consider relationship with parents

Section 479D(a)(3) of HEA

(GENERAL-24-88)



SchoolHouse Connection Resources



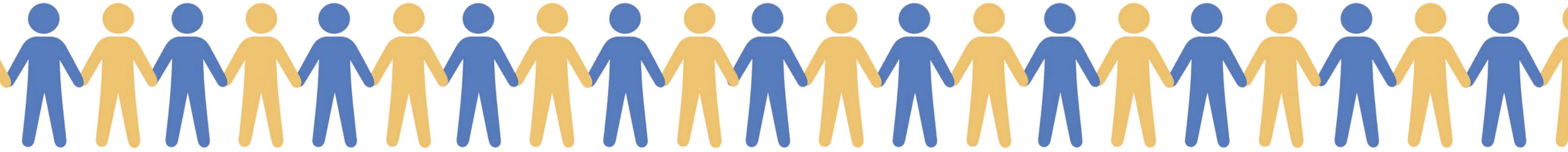
[Video: FAA How-To: Unaccompanied Homeless Youth 2025-26 FAFSA Renewals](#)



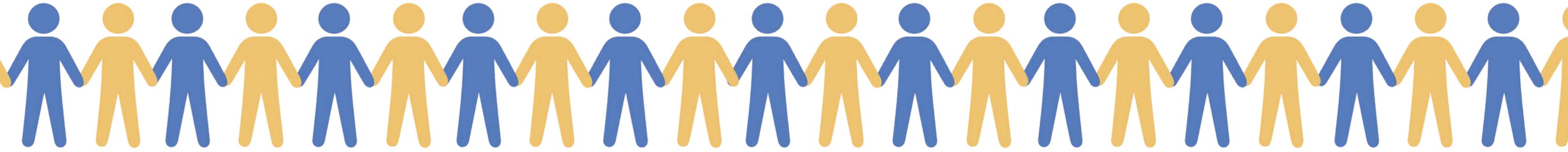
[Video: FAA How-To: Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination Role Play Interview](#)

FAFSA
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination: A Template for Financial Aid Administrators
 This template has been created to assist financial aid administrators in making unaccompanied homeless youth determinations and can be edited as appropriate for your institution.

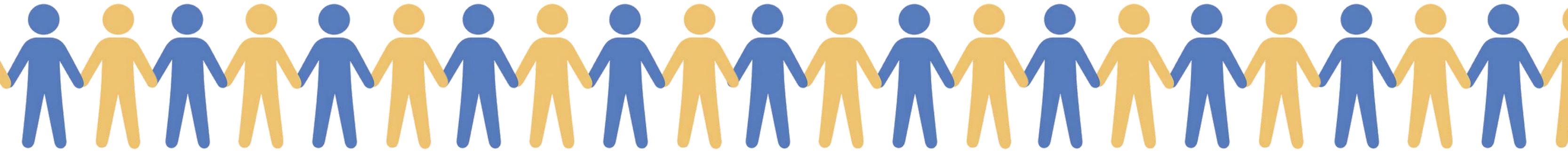
[2026-2027 Determination Template for FAAs](#)



Questions So Far?



Policies



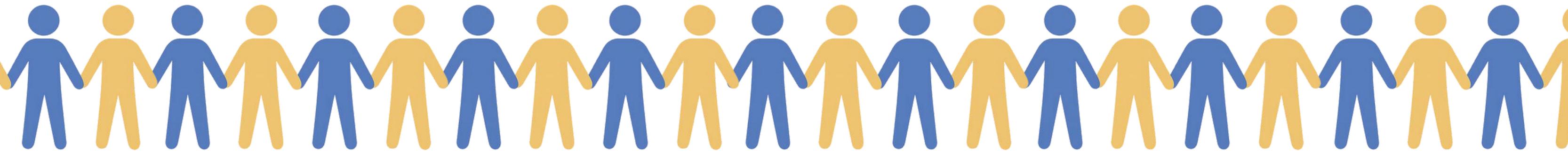
Policies

- **Presumed Independence**

- UHY shall be presumed independent in subsequent years unless conflicting information exists that their situation has changed.
- Section 479A(c)(2)(B)(iv) of HEA; (GENERAL-24-88)

- **Timeliness of Determinations**

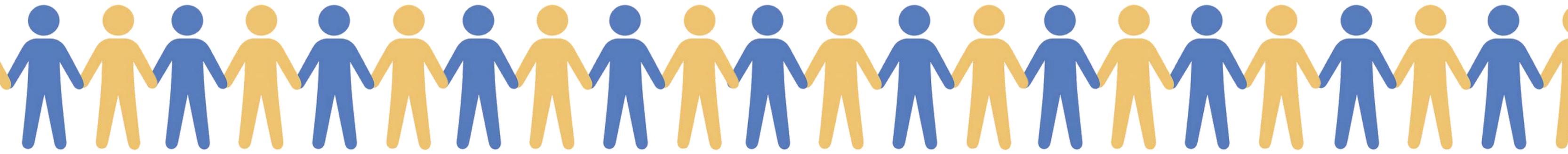
- UHY determinations must be made as quickly as possible (within 60 days of enrollment).
- (GEN-23-06); FSA Handbook AVG, Ch. 5: Special Cases



Policies

- **Documentation from Authorities**

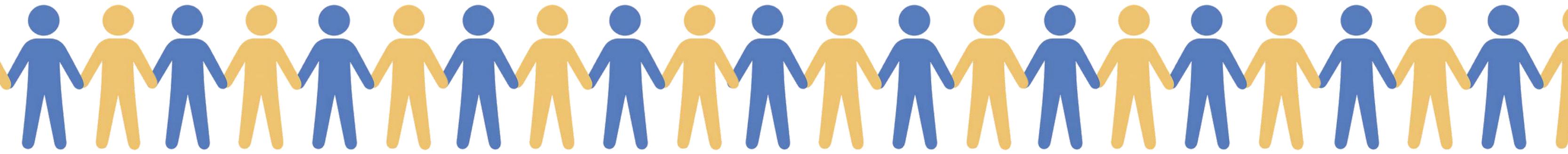
- If institutions received UHY documentation from an authorized entity, they should not request additional documentation.
- Documentation includes a written statement, documented phone call, or verifiable electronic match.
- Section 479D(a)(1) of HEA; NASFAA Ask Regs



Policies

- **FAA Responsibility**
 - If a student is unable to provide UHY documentation, the FAA must make a determination based on a written statement or documented interview with the student.
 - Made on a case-by-case basis, based on the definitions.
 - Focus on the IF, not the WHY
- **Section 479D(a)(2) of HEA; (GENERAL-24-88)**

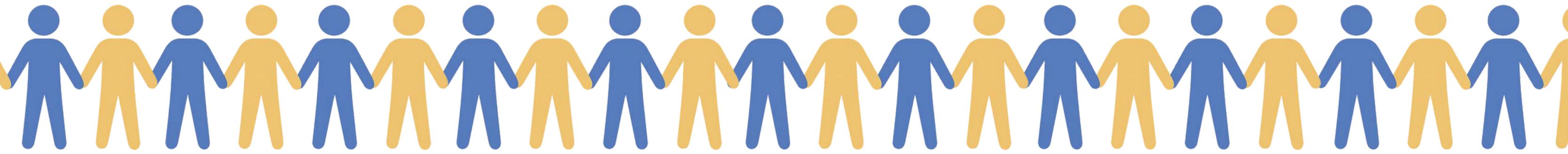
- **UHY is Separate and Distinct From Unusual Circumstances**
 - UHY is separate from professional judgments made under the unusual circumstances provision.
UHY are not considered Provisionally Independent Students.
 - **Section 479D(a)(3) of HEA; (GENERAL-24-88)**



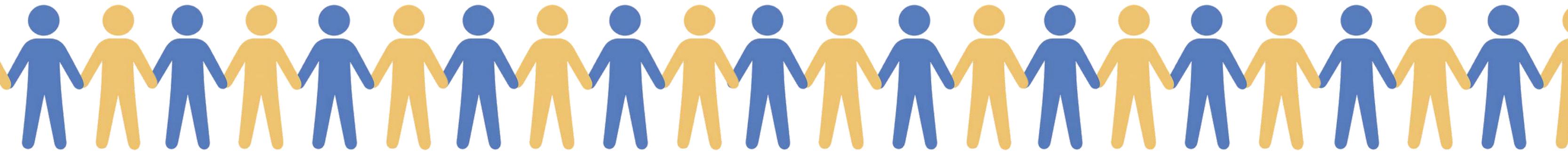
Policies - Conflicting Information

Per [NASFAA guidance](#), it is NOT considered conflicting information if the student meets the definitions of an unaccompanied homeless youth and:

- **Is in contact with their parents;**
- Is under the parents' insurance or taxes;
- Is in legal custody of their parents;
- Provides parental data on the FAFSA;
- Uses their parents' address as their mailing address;
- **Has a determination from an authority but has moved back in with their parents;** or
- Does not want to go to a shelter or accept help from source related to homelessness.



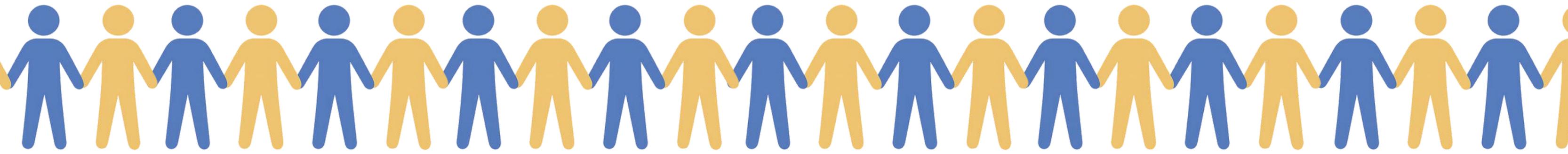
Best Practices and Resources



Best Practices

- Accept UHY determinations from authorized entities
- If the student qualifies as an independent student for other reasons, the school is not required to verify or confirm homelessness status
- Quickly provide UHY determinations for students unable to provide determinations from authorized entities. Remember:
 - Within 60 days of enrollment or request
 - Utilize SHC FAA determination template or written statement
 - Focus on the IF not the WHY a student is an UHY

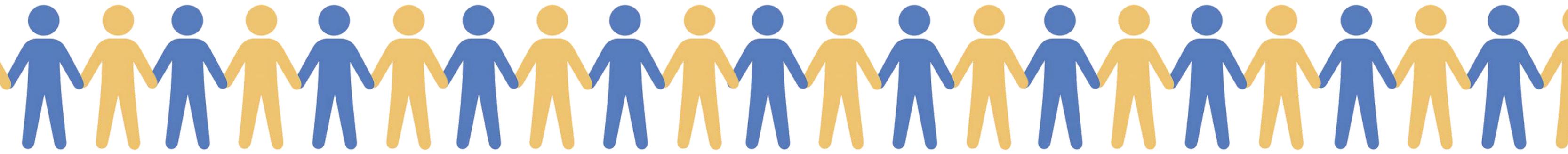
“Institutions should be able to show that their policies and procedures for reviewing and making homeless youth determinations are compliant with statutory requirements.”
(GEN-23-06)



Best Practices

- Examine processes for students who were previously identified as UHY from last year
- Include UHY determination process and provisional independence/dependency override process on financial aid website
- Host specific hours for students experiencing homelessness/independent students events
 - Colorado State University's Independent Student Visit Day
- Review Satisfactory Academic Progress policies
 - Homelessness as an extenuating circumstance

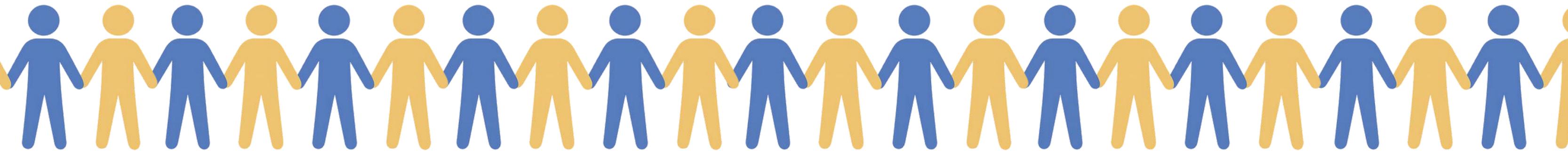
“Institutions should be able to show that their policies and procedures for reviewing and making homeless youth determinations are compliant with statutory requirements.”
(GEN-23-06)



Best Practices

- Refer UHY students to support/resources on campus and benefits outreach:
 - Homeless higher education liaison
 - Basic needs office, student success
 - SNAP, TANF, EITC, child tax credit, etc.
- Partner with local shelters, high schools/McKinney-Vento liaisons, TRIO/GEAR UP programs, and conduct financial aid nights
- Provide devices (laptop rentals, hotspots, etc.) to help students fill out the online FAFSA

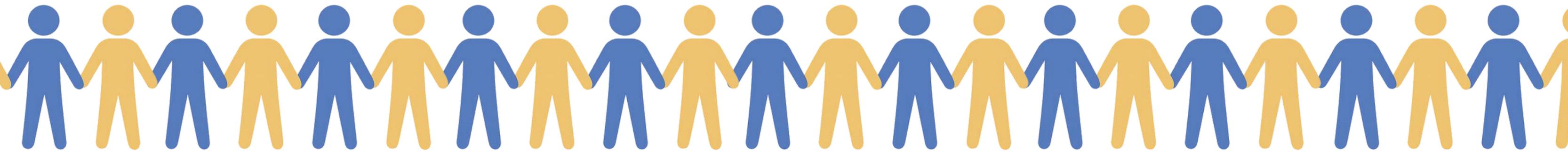
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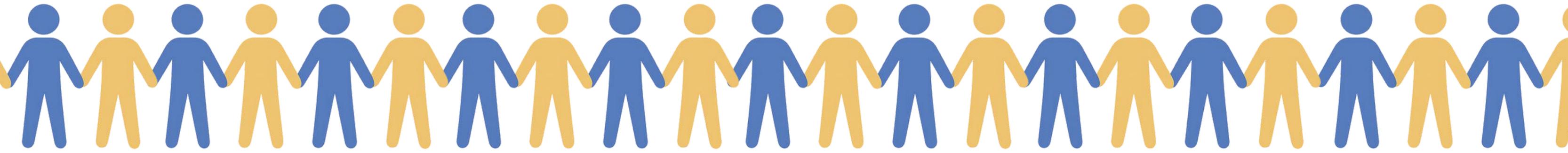
Best Practices

- Consider allowing virtual ID verification for UHY
- Consider that youth experiencing homelessness may not have access to consistent means of transportation
- UHY may not have vital documentation like IDs, birth certificates, Social Security Cards
 - [I Am Here: Vital Document Legal Hotline for Youth](#) by National Network for Youth
 - [SchoolHouse Connection ID Resource page](#)

“Institutions should be able to show that their policies and procedures for reviewing and making homeless youth determinations are compliant with statutory requirements.”
(GEN-23-06)



Questions and Discussion



Resources

- [SHC FAFSA Page](#)
 - [Federal Guidance about UHY July 19, 2024](#)
 - [FAFSA Independence Guide for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth](#)
 - [Navigating Financial Aid for Immigrant and Mixed-Status Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
 - [Financial Aid UHY Determination Template](#)
 - [Financial Aid Written Statement Template](#)
- [Tips for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed](#)

Upcoming SchoolHouse Connection Webinars:

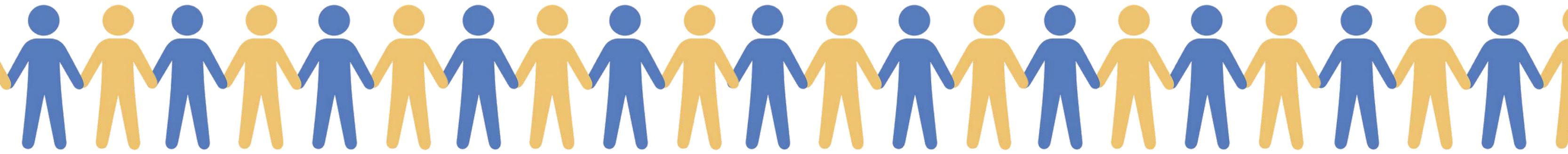
[Build Successful High School to College Transitions for Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)

April 9, 2025, 3:00 Eastern

[FAFSA and Homeless Youth: Scenarios and Solutions](#)

[Spring 2026](#)

April 23, 2026, 2:00 PM Eastern



Lets Connect!



Caleb McKay, FAAC®

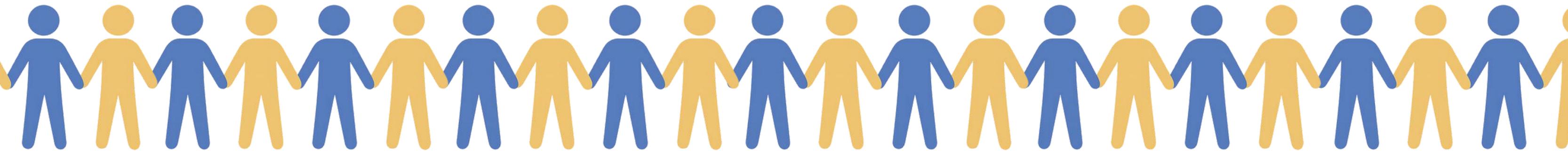
Senior Manager, FAFSA Completion

caleb@schoolhouseconnection.org

Scan the code or visit the link to fill out a quick survey for today's slides and a chance to win a **\$50 gift card!**



<https://forms.gle/T23o7J893V5GCmYs6>



Thank you!



Stronger Together:
Resilience Through Community