

Processing Eligibility and Housing Costs

Policy

Program staff must verify a child's age according to program policies and procedures. A program's policies and procedures cannot require families to provide documents that confirm a child's age, if doing so creates a barrier for the family to enroll the child. A program must verify a family's eligibility depending on whether the family is applying for a foster child, considered a McKinney-Vento family, or using income documentation. ERSEA staff must document all efforts to retrieve documentation from families. A program may deduct excessive housing costs for families whose housing costs are more than 30% of their gross income.

Performance Standard:

1302.12 Determining, verifying, and documenting eligibility

1305.2 Terms

Online Family Application

Families will attempt to upload their age eligibility, income/public assistance eligibility, foster eligibility, and homeless eligibility into the Online Family Application (OFA). The family will also upload their housing costs into the OFA. If the family is unable to upload the documents in this manner or unable to access the OFA, ERSEA staff will support the family with completing their application and submitting their required documents. ERSEA staff will use the following procedures to know what documentation may be accepted by families whether the information is uploaded into the Online Family Application or sent directly to ERSEA staff.

Procedure for Age Eligibility

Enrollment staff will utilize Alert to confirm a child's age using their immunization record. If the child is not in the Alert system, enrollment staff will request a copy of the child's birth certificate, hospital record, doctor's visit paperwork, passport, insurance letter/cards, or any other relevant documentation. If a parent is unable to provide these documents, enrollment staff will have them complete an age verification form. ERSEA staff must document all attempts to receive age verification before requesting an age verification form to be completed. A child's enrollment will not be delayed due to not

receiving these documents, so ERSEA staff will submit the application as Ready for Review even if they have not received these documents. The individual reviewing the application will attempt to retrieve these documents from the family, but the child's enrollment will not be delayed/prevented due to not having these documents.

Procedure for Foster Eligibility

ERSEA staff will request a copy of a child's foster placement letter from either a court order or other legal/government issued document, a written statement from a government child welfare official, or a foster care payment. ERSEA staff completing the interview will add the DHS caseworker's contact information on the child's profile tab in Shine under, "Emergency Contacts." A child's application will be submitted as Ready for Review even if these documents are not received. The individual reviewing the application will attempt to retrieve documents, if they have not already been received.

Procedure for Homeless Eligibility

If a child is currently experiencing not fixed, irregular and/or inadequate housing conditions, the child will be considered homeless. Notes will be made on the child's application to this effect. ERSEA staff will request a written statement from a homeless services provider, school personnel, or other service agency confirming the child is homeless. If another individual or party cannot provide a written statement, the family may sign a declaration explaining their housing situation. For families with barriers providing a written, signed declaration, the family may email ERSEA staff explaining their current housing situation. If the child is living in a car, abandoned building, tent, or on the streets, they will be considered "unsheltered homeless." ERSEA staff will submit the child's application as Ready for Review even if these documents are not received. The individual reviewing the application will attempt to get retrieve these documents, if they have not been received already.

A child's application will be submitted as unaccompanied youth for the following reasons:

1. A family was evicted and cannot find housing all together; parent placed child temporarily with a friend or relative.
2. The child left the home due to danger or extreme conflict. For prenatal parents, especially teen parents, the same will apply.
3. A family was homeless prior to a parent's incarceration.
4. The primary guardian became incarcerated, and the child's new caregiver arrangement is not fixed, regular, and adequate.

5. A family lost housing, so the parent placed the child temporarily with a friend or relative.

ERSEA staff will submit the application as unaccompanied youth for any of the aforementioned applicable areas. If the caregiver will have physical custody, but not legal custody of the child, and the legal guardian is unable to complete registration paperwork for the child, ERSEA staff will request the current caregiver get a signed declaration that they may pursue educational opportunities including permission to complete registration paperwork. ERSEA staff must document these interactions with the primary caregiver, if applicable. When received, ERSEA staff will include this document with the child's application.

Procedure for Income Eligibility

To verify eligibility based on gross income, ERSEA staff will use tax forms, paystubs, or other proof of income to determine the family's annual income for the relevant time period. Income is defined as, "Gross income and only includes wages, business income, unemployment compensation, pension or annuity payments, gifts that exceed the threshold for taxable income, and military income (excluding special pay for a member subject to hostile fire or imminent danger under 37 U.S.C. 310 or any basic allowance for housing under 37 U.S.C. 403 including housing acquired under the alternative authority under 10 U.S.C. 169 or any related provision of law)." ERSEA staff will no longer consider grants, scholarships, 401K retirement, military disability benefits, social security benefits, child support payments, or adoption subsidies as gross income for families.

If the family cannot provide tax forms, paystubs, or other proof of *gross* income, then a written statement may be provided from employers, including individuals who are self-employed. ERSEA staff must document all attempts to receive tax forms, paystubs, or other proof of income before accepting a written statement from an employer. This will happen during the weekly in process follow ups with families (see below).

If the family reports no income, ERSEA staff may receive a signed declaration from the family to this effect if program staff document attempts made to gather income. If the family can prove they have had a significant change to their income, then their current income circumstance may be considered. Once the required documents are received, ERSEA staff will submit the application as Ready for Review.

Procedure for Excessive Housing Costs

ERSEA staff will adjust a family's gross income when they qualify as having excessive housing costs. Excessive housing costs must be more than 30 percent of the family's gross income. Only the excess amount may be deducted from the family's gross income. Housing costs are rent/mortgage payments, homeowners/renters insurance, interest/taxes paid on home, and utilities (electric, water, gas, water, sewer, trash, and wood for heating homes). ERSEA staff will collect available bills, bank statements, and other relevant documentation to calculate total annual housing costs. These documents must be addressed to the guardians on the application. If a family cannot retrieve these documents because they have an unwritten agreement with another individual, ERSEA staff may accept a written declaration from the third-party individual/organization with parental consent. ERSEA staff must document attempts to retrieve housing costs from families and why a family cannot provide this documentation.

ERSEA staff will submit the application as ready for review upon receiving income eligibility. As families turn in their housing costs, ERSEA staff will update the application accordingly. As soon as a family is eligible for the housing cost deduction program, ERSEA staff will adjust their gross income as needed; ERSEA staff can continue to update the family's gross income, if needed, as a family continues to turn in more housing costs.

If a family does not qualify for the housing cost deduction program, ERSEA staff will include their housing costs in the application for review and to document why the family did not qualify for the housing cost deduction opportunity. These documents will remain in the child's application.