A college degree is increasingly necessary to move out of poverty and homelessness and live a healthy, productive life. Yet, youth experiencing homelessness face barriers in transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education, as well as barriers to financial aid, college retention, and college completion. These barriers are particularly acute for unaccompanied homeless youth, who face the struggles of homelessness without the support of a parent or guardian, and do not have access to parental income information or signature.

The undersigned organizations therefore wish to express our strong support for the removal of the definition of “youth” from the notes for questions 56-58 on the proposed 2018-2019 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Previous versions of the FAFSA had defined “youth” for unaccompanied homeless youth as age 21 and under. This definition created barriers for unaccompanied homeless youth who were 22 or 23 years old, who were often forced to submit extensive and burdensome documentation to prove their homeless status until they were no longer considered “dependent” at age 24.

The removal of the definition of “youth” will allow for a more streamlined process for students, as well as for financial aid administrators. It is consistent with the statute. We applaud this proposed change.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Barbara Duffield, Executive Director of SchoolHouse Connection, at barbara@schoolhouseconnection.org or Eric Masten, Director of Public Policy at the National Network for Youth, at eric.masten@nn4youth.org.

These comments are submitted on behalf of the following organizations:

National Network for Youth
SchoolHouse Connection