

# Rights and Responsibilities Certification Document

## Applicant's Rights, Responsibilities, Privacy, and Certification for the Pennsylvania State Grant Program

*To stay current with the status of your Pennsylvania State Grant, please keep your email address updated and regularly check your record through Account Access via PHEAA's Secure Sign-In at [www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org).*

All applicants have certain rights regarding their application for State Grant aid. When an applicant has been awarded a PA State Grant, the applicant also has certain responsibilities as a recipient. This document explains these rights and responsibilities and provides other important information. This document and other PA State Grant forms are available on PHEAA's website at [www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org). The rights and responsibilities of all applicants are provided for by 24 P.S. §5151, et. seq., and 22 Pa. Code §121.41, et. seq. To fully understand your rights and responsibilities, your full review of these provisions is encouraged. Nothing stated in this document supersedes applicable law, and to the extent, anything stated in this document conflicts with applicable law, applicable law controls.

PHEAA reserves the right to modify the Rights and Responsibilities Certification Document at any time. It is your responsibility to review and adhere to the Rights and Responsibilities Certification Document in effect at the time of each Application and/or receipt of each PA State Grant award. Submitting an Application and/or accepting a PA State Grant award constitutes your acknowledgement and acceptance of the then current Rights and Responsibilities Certification Document.

Section I explains how to submit applications and corrections, request reconsideration of PA State Grant status, and provides general information. Section II explains the primary PA State Grant eligibility requirements. These requirements are not all inclusive; however, all requirements are provided for in the PA statute and regulations or other authority. Section III provides information on PHEAA's Privacy Policy, the Federal Privacy Act, and use of your Social Security number. Section IV explains the certification and authorization that your acceptance provides.

For purposes of this Rights and Responsibilities Certification Document, "Application" includes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) and the Pennsylvania State Grant Form and/or PA State Grant Status Notice; "Institution" includes all schools, campuses, or additional locations that are affiliated through ownership or administration with the home postsecondary institution; and "State Grant" means the Pennsylvania State Grant Program.

### **Section I: Eligibility Update, Reconsideration, and General Information**

The Student Aid Report (SAR) you receive after filing the FAFSA will detail all of the responses you provided on your FAFSA. If you determine that any of the enrollment, school choice, or program of study data is incorrect on your SAR, you may correct that information through Account Access at [www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org). If financial data or other information is incorrect, you must submit corrections as specified on PHEAA's webpage at [www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org). In rare cases, you may receive a printed PA State Grant Status Notice on which to submit updates. When submitting changes on this form, appropriate signatures must be provided and the form must be returned to PHEAA.

When determining PA State Grant eligibility, income and assets have been disregarded when calculating awards for those applicants who are veterans. Income has also been disregarded for those applicants who provided information regarding a recent death or a recent permanent and total disability of a parent or spouse. For students who have provided information regarding a recent death or disability of a parent or spouse, disregarding income for award calculation and the related, special processing is limited to one award year, and income and asset information will be considered in future award years. This special processing is also subject to the maximum award allowed per cost of the institution the student is attending.

Assets held in a Pennsylvania 529 college savings plan account are disregarded when determining PA State Grant eligibility. If Pennsylvania 529 college savings plan assets have been included in the investments reported on the FAFSA, please indicate the value of those assets when completing the online Pennsylvania State Grant Form or PA State Grant Status Notice.

Failure to comply with the rights and responsibilities under which the PA State Grant is awarded may result in forfeiture of the PA State Grant award. **Once a recipient is found to be out of compliance with the eligibility requirements, or if you question your eligibility for any reason, you are required to report your situation in writing to PHEAA, Pennsylvania State Grant Program, P.O. Box 8157, Harrisburg, PA 17105-8157 immediately, but no later than April 1 of the applicable academic year (or October 31 following the applicable summer term). Failure to do so may result in legal action against you.** By submitting the Application and related documents, you authorize your institution to release any and all information relevant to your PA State Grant eligibility to PHEAA.

**Public Notice** - By accepting a PA State Grant award, the recipient authorizes PHEAA to make the required public announcement of such and/or provide your information, including your email address, to other Commonwealth agencies and officials. Any student who objects to such announcement must notify PHEAA in writing within 14 days of notice of his/her award.

**Payment of PA State Grant** - Payment of your PA State Grant award is made directly to your institution. Institutions are required to verify student eligibility and must report questionable student eligibility to PHEAA and withhold crediting to your account in those cases.

**Aid Deferments** - PHEAA may approve a request for deferment of a PA State Grant award for one academic term at a time provided that an award may not be deferred beyond July 1 of any given calendar year. As such, PA State Grant awards may not be deferred from one award year to the next; reapplication is necessary.

**Apply for Your PA State Grant Each Year** - You must apply/reapply for PA State Grant aid each year by the appropriate deadline. Your eligibility will depend on program funding and compliance with all eligibility requirements.

**Application for Summer Aid** - If you will be enrolled during the summer, it is your responsibility to file the separate PA State Grant application which is available online. An academic year grant is normally processed for the period that begins in September and ends in May and does not cover the summer term.

**Approved Institutions** - The institution you attend must be approved for participation in the PA State Grant Program. Check with the financial aid office at the institution you are planning to attend to confirm the institution is approved.

**NOTE** - With certain limited exceptions, applicants attending institutions in Maryland or New York are not eligible for a PA State Grant award.

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## Section II: Primary Eligibility Requirements for the PA State Grant Program

**Academic Progress** - A student is required to successfully complete a minimum of six (6) semester credits per semester (or the equivalent) for each part-time PA State Grant award received and a minimum of twelve (12) semester credits per semester (or the equivalent) for each full-time PA State Grant award received. Credits earned for repeat courses which were previously counted when PA State Grant progress was verified cannot be counted again. Academic progress is confirmed by the financial aid administrator at your institution at the end of each award year. Failure to meet the minimum requirements means that you are ineligible for further PA State Grant aid until you have successfully completed the required number of credits. For example, a student receiving a full-time PA State Grant during the fall semester and a part-time PA State Grant award during the spring semester must successfully complete a minimum of eighteen (18) semester credits before being eligible for any further PA State Grant aid. Full-time students enrolled in four-year degree programs progressing at the rate of only twenty-four (24) semester credits per year (or the equivalent), while meeting the minimum PA State Grant progress standard, will utilize all of their PA State Grant eligibility before completing the minimum 120 credits required of most bachelor degree programs. If you have any questions regarding your academic progress or credits that may be counted toward PA State Grant academic progress, you should contact your financial aid administrator.

**Criminal Offense** - If you have been convicted of a criminal offense for which you are currently incarcerated, you must notify PHEAA in writing. You are **NOT** eligible for a PA State Grant award. You should also be aware that, by law, schools are required to report recipients who are incarcerated.

**Default** - Students who have defaulted (or have a claim of default pending) on any educational loan guaranteed or reinsured by the federal government, state government, or any institution are not eligible for a PA State Grant and must notify PHEAA of such default in writing. This also applies to programs where PA State Grant awards have been converted to loans due to failure to meet all eligibility or service requirements and the loan is in a default status.

**Domicile** - Domicile is a person's true, fixed, and permanent home, the place to which the person intends to return whenever absent.

A student who is 18 years of age or older at the time of application must have been a bona fide domiciliary of Pennsylvania for a period of at least 12 consecutive months **immediately** preceding the date of application, exclusive of time the student spent while enrolled in an educational institution if the student came into or remained in Pennsylvania for the purpose of attending a postsecondary school.

A student who is under 18 years of age at the time of application must have a supporting parent or guardian (defined as a person with whom a minor child has lived and in whose continuous direct care and control the child has been for at least the last two consecutive years) who has been a bona fide domiciliary of Pennsylvania for a period of at least 12 consecutive months **immediately** preceding the date of application and who continues to be a Pennsylvania domiciliary until fall term classes commence.

A student is ineligible if the student: (1) ceases (or the parent(s) or guardian ceases if the student is under 18) to be a domiciliary prior to the first day of classes of the academic year; (2) receives, due to residency, the benefit of in-state tuition or fees at a public postsecondary school located in another state; or (3) indicates that the state of legal residence is a state other than Pennsylvania. If you are registered to vote in a state other than Pennsylvania, you are considered to have abandoned your Pennsylvania domicile and shall be ineligible for a PA State Grant award unless and until you register to vote in Pennsylvania. If you again register to vote in Pennsylvania, you should contact PHEAA immediately.

PHEAA shall make the final decision on all matters pertaining to domicile with respect to PA State Grant eligibility.

**Enrollment Status** - Half-time enrollment is defined as at least six (6) semester credits but less than twelve (12) semester credits per semester (or the equivalent). Full-time enrollment is defined as the equivalent of at least twelve (12) semester credits per semester. For institutions operating on clock hours, full-time enrollment is normally the equivalent of 450 clock hours per term or non-term payment period.

**Financial Data** - In order to be eligible to receive a PA State Grant award, you/your family must demonstrate sufficient financial need as determined by PHEAA's approved award formula in place for the applicable award year. The applicant, the applicant's parents/stepparents, and/or spouse who provided financial data on the FAFSA shall also, if requested by PHEAA, (i) provide PHEAA with relevant financial data, including copies of state and federal income tax returns and/or other relevant documents; and/or (ii) authorize the Director of the Pennsylvania Personal Income Tax Bureau and the Federal Internal Revenue Service to release to PHEAA a copy or extract of state and federal income tax returns or transcripts filed by such person.

**Secondary School Graduation** - You must be (i) a graduate of an approved secondary school (including those in American Territories, American military bases overseas, and those located in foreign countries if they have American accreditation); (ii) the recipient of a Commonwealth secondary school diploma or the equivalency diploma of another state; or (iii) the recipient of any diploma or certificate accepted and/or approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as fulfillment of the secondary school graduation requirement. Diplomas issued through distance learning or correspondence courses do not fulfill the secondary school graduation requirement.

**Maximum Number of PA State Grants** - Students are limited to a maximum number of PA State Grant awards even though some students may require additional terms to complete their program. Students enrolled in an associate degree program are typically limited to two academic year PA State Grants awards (2.00 grants). By law, no student may receive more than four academic year PA State Grant awards (4.00 grants) except students enrolled in a bona fide five-year program or specially approved five-year cooperative work-study program. This is also true for students enrolling part-time, with each term award counting as one-half of a full-time term. A summer PA State Grant award is included in the maximum number of PA State Grant awards that you may receive.

**Processing Applications** - Upon receipt of an application and the required financial data, PHEAA will review the application form for completeness. Where the form is found to be incomplete, additional data will be requested and final processing of the application will be discontinued until all requested data is submitted. In its sole discretion, PHEAA may terminate the processing of an incomplete application when the additional data is not supplied to PHEAA after two requests.

**Program of Study** - Your total program of study must be at least two academic years in length and must be approved by PHEAA for eligibility in the Pennsylvania State Grant Program. Two academic years is defined as the equivalent of a minimum of 60 semester credits or 1,800 clock hours of instruction (1,500 clock hours in the case of programs leading to the Associate in Specialized Business or Specialized Technology degree). If attending a school that is neither headquartered nor domiciled in Pennsylvania, the program of study must be structured so that at least 50 percent of the total credits/clock hours required for completion are earned through classroom instruction.

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**Undergraduate Enrollment** - You must be enrolled as an undergraduate on at least a half-time basis and must not have received or completed all requirements for your first baccalaureate or professional degree. Remedial, developmental, or foundation courses may, under certain circumstances, count toward the minimum number of credits necessary for enrollment (contact your financial aid administrator to discuss your circumstances). If attending a school that is neither headquartered nor domiciled in Pennsylvania, at least 50 percent of each term's credits/clock hours must be earned through classroom instruction. If you have a medical disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and you are enrolled in a program of study that is structured to allow you to complete at least 50% of your credits or clock hours in the classroom, you may request an exception to the 50% classroom term enrollment requirement by completing the ADA Accommodation Request Form. This ADA Accommodation Request is only applicable to students attending schools that are neither headquartered nor domiciled in Pennsylvania. Please visit [pheaa.org](http://pheaa.org) for additional details.

**Veteran Status** - To be considered a veteran for PA State Grant aid you must have (i) engaged in active service in the United States Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard); or (ii) as an enlistee of the National Guard or Reserves, been activated for duty other than state or training; or (iii) been a cadet or midshipman at one of the service academies. In any event, you must have been released under a condition other than dishonorable, uncharacterized, bad conduct, or other than honorable conditions and, if not a veteran now, will be one by June 30 of the award year for which aid is being requested.

## **Section III - Privacy, Information on the Privacy Act and Use of Your Social Security Number (SSN)**

In general, PHEAA collects information to verify your information, to determine if you are eligible for a PA State Grant award and to administer your PA State Grant award. For a specific description and use of information collected, refer to PHEAA's Privacy Policy, which is available at [www.pheaa.org](http://www.pheaa.org).

The Privacy Act of 1974 requires that each federal, state, or local agency that asks for your SSN or other information must tell you the following:

1. Its legal right to ask for the information and whether the law says you must give it;
2. What purpose the agency has in asking for it and how it will be used; and
3. What could happen if you do not provide it

We require your SSN to verify your identity, process your application, and maintain your record, including your college attendance, progress, and your receipt of PA State Grant funds. If you do not provide your SSN, you will not receive PA State Grant aid. Pennsylvania State Grant applicants are hereby advised that disclosure of their SSN is and has been a requirement and a condition for participation in the Pennsylvania State Grant Program since its inception. PHEAA, without such an identifier, would have difficulty in maintaining proper program records. Section 7(a)(2) of the Privacy Act provides that an agency may continue to require the disclosure of an individual's SSN where the agency required this disclosure under statute or regulations prior to January 1, 1975, in order to verify the identity of the individual. Beginning in 1966 with Form S-1A-66 (First Application), applicants have been required to answer all questions completely or face disqualification for PA State Grant assistance. All subsequent forms utilized by PHEAA contain the SSN or account number as the identifier of the applicant, including PA State Grant award announcements to the student and the institution's financial aid administrator.

PHEAA's Board of Directors on February 27, 1969 adopted regulations including Article IV-Scholarship Program Requirements and Procedures, Section 4.4, dealing with processing of applications, which provides that all requested data must be received for scholarship consideration. Based upon the same legal authority, PHEAA also requires the parent's, stepparent's, and/or spouse's SSN on the application. The parent's, stepparent's, and/or spouse's SSN will be used by PHEAA to obtain family income information from the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue, Bureau of Individual Taxes. The information is necessary for evaluating the applicant's need for PA State Grant aid.

## **Section IV: Statement of Certification and Authorization**

Irrespective of the use of singular or plural pronouns, the following applies to all persons that submit an Application, agree to the "Statement of Certification and Authorization" or accept a PA State Grant award.

By submitting the Application, agreeing to the Statement of Certification and Authorization, or by accepting a PA State Grant award:

- (i) I/we authorize PHEAA for any year in which the applicant is considered for PA State Grant aid: to make public announcement of any PA State Grant award, including the institution of attendance and other information categorized as directory information; to disclose your contact information, including your email address, to other state agencies and legislators; to disclose to postsecondary institution(s) selected by the applicant and to others administering financial aid which may bear on eligibility under the application, all information on any application and any information, communication and/or documentation submitted to or acquired by PHEAA at any time, including state and federal tax documents obtained hereunder; to use the data from any application to determine the applicant's eligibility for PA State Grant assistance as necessary; to direct the Director of the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue, Bureau of Individual Taxes to submit to PHEAA a certified copy or extract of my/our Pennsylvania state income tax return(s) filed for the year(s) designated by PHEAA; and to direct other federal, state and local government agencies to release to PHEAA information in their possession which may bear on my/our eligibility. I/we also agree to submit, or authorize PHEAA to obtain from the District Director of the Internal Revenue Service, a certified copy or extract of my/our federal income tax return(s) and documents for the year(s) designated by PHEAA and that failure to provide such copies or authorization, when requested to do so by PHEAA, may result in ineligibility for PA State Grant aid and the requirement to refund to PHEAA previously awarded PA State Grants. I/we understand that all documents submitted to PHEAA become the property of PHEAA and cannot be returned.
- (ii) I/we declare under penalty of the criminal laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that the information provided on the Pennsylvania State Grant Form, as well as any information and documents that I/we have submitted and/or subsequently submit, have been examined by me/us and to the best of my/our knowledge such information is true, correct, and complete. If PHEAA determines subsequent to a PA State Grant award that the applicant was awarded a PA State Grant for which the applicant was not eligible, I/we agree to pay back the entire amount of the PA State Grant. Moreover, if PHEAA determines that the ineligibility resulted from a misrepresentation, I/we agree to pay back to PHEAA not less than three (3) times the amount of the aid received. I/we understand that Pennsylvania law permits PHEAA to seek civil damages and criminal prosecution for such overawards and misrepresentations, which may include monetary fines and imprisonment.
- (iii) I, the applicant, authorize and direct the institution at which I am enrolled to release to PHEAA any records or other information in the possession of the institution or any of its officers or agents which relate to my record at their institution or bear upon my eligibility for PA State Grant assistance. If a PA State Grant is awarded, I certify that it will be used only for educational expenses such as tuition, fees, books, room, and board.
- (iv) I/we certify authorize PHEAA to use my/our email address or a number for a cellular telephone or other wireless device for communications regarding the PA State Grant Program which may be sent to me/us through email, automated dialing equipment, artificial or prerecorded voice, or text messages
- (v) I/we certify that I have read and reviewed and understand the entire 'Rights and Responsibilities Certification Document' and PHEAA's Privacy Policy.