



## **Dispute Resolution Process**

### **Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program**

Pursuant to the McKinney-Vento Act, every state must develop procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding the educational placement of homeless children and youths. 42 U.S.C §11432(g)(1)(C). The state must ensure that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) comply with requirements set forth in the McKinney-Vento Act including ensuring immediate enrollment, providing written notice to families concerning school selection, enrollment decisions and providing enrollment and pendency in the school of choice while a dispute is being resolved. 42 U.S.C §11432(g)(2)(A).

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has developed the following procedures to govern the resolution of disputes regarding enrollment, school selection, homeless status and complaints of non-compliance with legal requirements pertaining to the education for homeless children and youths:

#### **Level 1 – A dispute may be raised with a LEA.**

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the child or youth involved must immediately be admitted to the school in which they are seeking enrollment, pending resolution of the dispute 42 U.S.C.§11432(g)(3)(E)(i). PDE recommends that the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth who initiates the dispute contact the LEA liaison for individuals experiencing homelessness as soon as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. If the person initiating the dispute does not contact the LEA liaison directly, the LEA shall be responsible for contacting the LEA liaison regarding the dispute as soon as possible and referring the family or youth involved to the liaison.

The LEA liaison shall ensure that the child or youth is immediately enrolled, explain the dispute resolution process to families and help them to use it 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(E)(iii). The LEA shall issue a written disposition of the dispute within 20 business days after the LEA liaison is notified of the dispute. The disposition shall be provided to the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth and shall explain the basis for the decision and advise the parent, guardian or youth of the right to appeal. 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(E)(i).

*NOTE:* The LEA should use and maintain copies of PDE's "Notice of Procedural Safeguards" form (see attached) which ensures that all LEAs (a) inform families of the basis of their decision regarding enrollment or school selection; (b) notifies families of their right to remain in their school of choice pending resolution of the dispute and (c) explains the procedures for challenging the decision of the LEA.

**Level 2 – A complaint may be filed with a McKinney-Vento coordinator.**

If the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth is dissatisfied with the LEA's disposition of a dispute or would like to raise any issue of McKinney-Vento Act noncompliance, they may file a complaint or appeal with a McKinney-Vento site or regional coordinator or with the state coordinator. (See attached list which contains contact information for all of the McKinney-Vento coordinators in Pennsylvania). In lieu of filing an appeal with a McKinney-Vento coordinator, a parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth may elect to appeal the LEA decision directly to a court of competent jurisdiction. Participation in the appeal procedure is not required prior to taking legal action.

- Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths should be informed that they can provide written or oral documentation to support their position; and
- Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths should be given the opportunity to challenge the school system's assertions.

A regional or site coordinator with whom a complaint or appeal is filed must notify the state coordinator immediately. Upon being notified, the state coordinator will review the complaint or appeal and assign it to a site or regional coordinator for disposition. The coordinator to whom the appeal is assigned may contact, interview and accept documentation from any individual or LEA involved, and shall issue a written disposition within 20 business days after the complaint or appeal has been assigned. The disposition shall be provided to the LEA and the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth involved. The child or youth shall continue to be

enrolled in the school in which he or she is seeking enrollment until the complaint or appeal is resolved or until a disposition from a McKinney-Vento coordinator is received.

If a decision cannot be reached or agreed upon as the regional coordinator level, the dispute will be forwarded to the state coordinator for resolution. The state coordinator will view all information and interview all concerned parties involved. The Office of Chief Counsel will be included in the resolution process as needed. If mediation services are needed, the state coordinator will assist in the mediation and may also invite those involved to have the dispute mediated at any time in the process through the Dispute Resolution Program operated by the Commonwealth Office of General Counsel (OGC). The [OGC Dispute Resolution Program](#) is a voluntary informal process through which a trained mediator assists in reaching a mutually acceptable resolution.

Participating in mediation is not a waiver of the right to file a lawsuit nor is participation in mediation required prior to taking legal action.

*NOTE:* The parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth may file a complaint with the McKinney-Vento site, regional or state coordinator on the attached complaint form. However, the use of the attached form is not mandatory. Any dispute raised by a homeless family or youth concerning school enrollment or any other right under the McKinney-Vento Act whether received via telephone, letter or any mode of communication shall be treated as a complaint.

#### Attachments

[Dispute Letter-English](#) (PDF)

[Dispute Letter-Spanish](#) (PDF)