

REMOVING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FOR SURVIVORS: PENNSYLVANIA'S ADDRESS CONFIDENTIALITY PROGRAM

August 2026

Pennsylvania's Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) allows survivors of certain crimes to keep their residential addresses confidential and provides a substitute P.O. Box address that state and local agencies, including schools, must accept for all official purposes, including school enrollment. This fact sheet explains the basics of the ACP: who can participate and how participation affects school enrollment and transportation to school.

WHAT IS THE ADDRESS CONFIDENTIALITY PROGRAM (ACP)?

The ACP is a Pennsylvania program authorized by the Domestic and Sexual Violence Victim Address Confidentiality Act.¹ The program provides an alternative mailing address that can be used on official documents to ensure that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking, and child abduction can keep their home addresses confidential and out of publicly available records.² The new substitute address can be used for school records, as well as driver's licenses, utility bills, marriage licenses, voter registration, court and state government records, employment records, and vehicle registration.³ Once a survivor is enrolled, the Pennsylvania Office of Victim Advocate will forward all registered and first-class mail received at a P.O. Box address assigned to program participants.⁴

According to the state Office of Victim Advocate, 564 households were registered for the ACP in November 2022, including 642 adult participants and 832 children.⁵ Since then, the number of participants has increased to about 1,050 active adult participants and more than 2,000 protected children.⁶

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ACP?

Survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking, and child abduction are eligible for the ACP. In addition, those living in the same household as a survivor, such as children and other relatives living in the same household, may also participate in the ACP.⁷

Those who are eligible for ACP have commonly experienced "interpersonal violence," which refers to violence between people, and includes domestic violence and abuse, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, physical assault, and psychological abuse.

Interpersonal violence impacts many children and families, and without the appropriate support and protection — such as protecting a victim’s physical address from disclosure — this violence and trauma can significantly impact a child’s ability to access their education and can have long-term consequences, including health problems and increased risk of unstable employment.¹⁰

HOW DOES INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE IMPACT A CHILD’S EDUCATION?

A child’s exposure to interpersonal violence often results in disruptions to executive functioning, difficulty focusing, dysregulation, and anxiety — all of which can undermine a child’s ability to learn, acquire, and retain new information. In addition, traumatic stress symptoms such as dissociation, aggression, and somatization, a psychological process where mental distress, stress, or emotional pain turns into real physical body symptoms, undermine social-emotional and behavioral functioning and can lead to deficits in development and an increased risk of school exclusion.¹¹

Due to intersecting systemic failures, students who have experienced or witnessed interpersonal violence experience significant barriers to education. These failures include breakdowns in cross-agency coordination, lack of or inadequate trauma-informed behavioral and mental health supports in schools (and communities), and lack of staff training on properly identifying and assessing the special education needs of trauma-impacted students.¹² These students commonly fail to receive the additional academic support they need or have unidentified or unmet special education needs. They also are more likely to experience delays in school enrollment, increased barriers to attendance, higher rates of exclusionary discipline, more school disruptions, and lower high school graduation rates.¹³

IS BEING PART OF THE ACP THE SAME AS HAVING A PROTECTION FROM ABUSE ORDER (PFA)?

No, the ACP and a Protection from Abuse Order (PFA) are two entirely separate protections. A PFA is a court order issued by a family court judge that makes it illegal for a named abuser to contact the person named on the order (and their children, if named on the order) for a specified period of time, usually up to three years.¹⁴ It is important to know that you do not need to have a PFA in place in order to participate in the ACP.

HOW ARE BLACK AND BROWN STUDENTS IMPACTED BY EDUCATION BARRIERS IN SCHOOL?

Interpersonal violence affects students from all backgrounds. However, Black and Brown students are more likely to be severely impacted by education barriers created by exposure to interpersonal violence.⁸ Due to systemic racism and individual racial biases in all areas of K-12 education, including school enrollment, special education processes, and school discipline, Black and Brown children are more likely to be harmed and experience greater harm. For example, due to racial bias, Black and Brown students are more likely to receive punitive disciplinary consequences for school-based mental health crises or trauma-based behaviors and are more likely to experience school exclusion compared to white peers exhibiting identical behavior.⁹

HOW DO I ENROLL IN THE ACP?

To enroll in the ACP, you can complete an online [ACP application](#). If you need help filling out your application, you can visit your [local Victim Service Program](#) or call the Office of Victim Advocate at 800-563-6399 for assistance. The completed application can be emailed to RA-PMOVA-ACPPROGRAM@pa.gov or mailed to the following address:

Office of Victim Advocate
1101 S. Front St, Suite 5200
Harrisburg, PA 17112

HOW LONG CAN I USE MY ACP ADDRESS?

Enrollment in the ACP lasts three years, though participants will be given the option to renew their participation before their P.O. Box address expires.¹⁵ While enrolled, a participant may choose to voluntarily withdraw from participation at any time.¹⁶ If a participant's address expires or the participant chooses to voluntarily withdraw from the program, they retain the right to reapply for the ACP in the future.¹⁷

AS AN ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANT, WILL MY PHYSICAL ADDRESS REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL?

Yes. For a survivor of domestic violence, abuse, or other ACP-eligible form of interpersonal violence, the right to maintain a confidential residential address is fundamental to protecting one's physical and psychological safety, personal autonomy, and freedom from an abuser.¹⁸ For a child residing in a household that is participating in the ACP, the protection of ACP participation holds the same importance. It is illegal for a school or other agency to wrongfully reveal an ACP participant's address;¹⁹ it also can raise serious safety concerns. For a student, safety concerns, including feeling unsafe on their way to or from school, can create increased barriers to school attendance, which could result in a truancy referral.²⁰ See ELC-PA's fact sheet on [Addressing Attendance Barriers \('Truancy'\) & School Attendance in PA](#) for more information. It is essential that families know their child's address will remain confidential, so students can attend school without fear that their safety will be compromised by a wrongful disclosure.

ARE THERE ANY CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH MY ADDRESS COULD BE DISCLOSED EVEN THOUGH I AM ENROLLED IN THE ACP?

Your address only could be disclosed by the Office of Victim Advocate while you are enrolled in the ACP only in very limited circumstances: by **court order**, by written **waiver** approved by the Office of Victim Advocate, or in the event of an **emergency**.²¹

Court Order: The Office of Victim Advocate can disclose a participant's address if they are specifically directed to do so in compliance with a valid court order signed by a judge.²²

Waiver: A state or local government agency may make a written request for a waiver or permission, which also must be in writing, from the Office of Victim Advocate to disclose a participant's address.²³ For the waiver to be granted, the agency must show that disclosure of the participant's actual residential address is necessary for the agency to meet its statutory or

administrative obligations and that the agency has procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of the ACP participant's actual address.²⁴

Emergency: In an emergency, a participant's address may be disclosed to a government agency upon request only if it will prevent physical harm to the program participant or a family member, or if law enforcement has shown a need for immediate disclosure of the address.²⁵ In this case, a participant's address may only be used to the extent necessary to respond to the emergency, and the participant's actual address must be disposed of as soon as practicable after the emergency ends.²⁶

HOW DO I ENROLL MY CHILD IN SCHOOL AND VERIFY THAT I RESIDE IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT WHILE KEEPING MY ADDRESS CONFIDENTIAL?

To enroll a child in school, the person enrolling the child typically must provide documents showing that a student lives in the district, such as a lease or utility bill in addition to other requirements. See ELC-PA's fact sheet on [How to Enroll a Child in Public School](#) for more information about school enrollment. An ACP participant is **not** required to disclose their confidential residential address to enroll their child in school.

For the purposes of school enrollment, the state Office of Victim Advocate can provide a "Residence Verification Letter" to confirm that an ACP participant lives within the boundaries of the school district in which they are enrolling their child. If the school uses an online enrollment system, a P.O. Box address may be automatically rejected by that enrollment system. If this happens, parents or guardians should contact the enrollment office by phone or in person, inform them that the child participates in the ACP, and ensure that the district receives a Residence Verification Letter from the state Office of Victim Advocate.

WHAT IF MY CHILD'S SCHOOL HAS NOT HEARD OF THE ACP?

You may provide your school with the [ACP fact sheet](#) developed by the state to inform your child's school of the program. If a school has questions about their responsibilities under the program, they may get in contact with the Office of Victim Advocate by calling 800-563-6399.

WHAT IF MY CONFIDENTIAL ADDRESS IS ALREADY ON FILE WITH THE SCHOOL?

You should request that the address on file with your child's school be updated to your new ACP P.O. Box address and request that any documents already on file that include a confidential residential address be redacted or revised by submitting a [FERPA Record Correction Request](#).

HOW WILL INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACP AFFECT TRANSPORTATION TO SCHOOL?

If your child otherwise receives transportation to and from school, participation in the ACP does not change their right to transportation. You should request that your child's pickup and dropoff location be changed to an agreed-upon alternative location, such as an intersection near your home, so that your child's transportation can be arranged without using your residential address.

If your student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and receives specialized transportation services, discuss with your child's IEP Team how the school can arrange an appropriate, confidential transportation route, including specialized transportation if needed. You

should also ensure that all special education documents (e.g., IEPs, evaluations, etc.) reference your ACP P.O. Box address.

WHAT IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE ACP AND AM EXPERIENCING HOUSING INSTABILITY?

Students experiencing homelessness or housing instability — including but not limited to students living in temporary housing or doubled-up with friends — have additional rights under a federal law called the McKinney-Vento Act, such as the right to school stability and transportation to and from school as explained below. Students who are otherwise eligible for McKinney-Vento protections do not lose any of those rights because of participation in the ACP; however, ACP participation does not make a student eligible for McKinney-Vento protections. For more information on McKinney-Vento eligibility and the rights of students experiencing housing instability, see our fact sheet on [The Rights of Students Experiencing Homelessness](#).

Students in foster care — who are also highly mobile — also have the same right as others to participate in ACP and similarly do not lose any federal protections under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), including the right to school stability, transportation, and immediate enrollment.²⁷

CAN MY ADDRESS REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL WHEN I ARRANGE TRANSPORTATION UNDER MCKINNEY-VENTO OR ESSA?

Yes. Students participating in the ACP who also are eligible for transportation under the McKinney-Vento Act should work with the school's McKinney-Vento Liaison — staff who are designated by schools to assist students experiencing homelessness — to coordinate an alternative spot for pickup and dropoff, such as an intersection near the student's home. The same applies to children in foster care whose resource parent or caseworker can work with the school's [Point of Contact](#) to coordinate transportation. See our fact sheet on [Rights of Students in Foster Care](#).

WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM AN ACP PARTICIPANT, BUT MY CHILD'S SCHOOL IS SAYING THEY NEED TO DO A HOME VISIT TO CONFIRM MCKINNEY-VENTO ELIGIBILITY?

If your child's school is requesting a home visit to confirm your child's McKinney-Vento eligibility, you can explain that your address is confidential and protected through your participation in ACP and request that your school's McKinney-Vento Liaison work with you to identify another way to verify your child's McKinney-Vento eligibility. This might include, if you are comfortable, giving your permission for the school to work with outside providers or agencies that can verify your housing status without disclosing your residential address.

Generally, when verifying McKinney-Vento eligibility — including housing — schools must be reasonable and protect your confidentiality.²⁸ As recognized by the National Center for Homeless Education, which provides technical assistance for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, efforts to confirm eligibility should take place by conducting the minimal investigation necessary to verify a student's living arrangement.²⁹ School districts should not follow students or family members, observe them from outside their residences, talk to their neighbors about them, contact anyone outside of the family and school without your explicit permission, use

law enforcement to conduct home visits, or insist on documents like bills or eviction notices to which the family may not have access.³⁰

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, a student or family is never required to self-identify as experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Schools are obligated to notify families about these important protections, and schools must treat a student or family who self-identifies as experiencing homelessness as McKinney-Vento eligible by providing school stability or immediate enrollment in a new school.³¹ If a school disagrees with a student's eligibility, it can initiate a dispute resolution process (described in greater detail in the fact sheet linked above). Until this process is completely over, a student must be treated as eligible, be enrolled, remain in school, and receive all protections of the Act.³²

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY ADDRESS IS WRONGLY DISCLOSED OR MY CHILD'S SCHOOL WILL NOT COOPERATE WITH MY ACP PARTICIPATION?

If your address is disclosed wrongfully, negligently, or inadvertently by your child's school, or your school is otherwise out of compliance with the requirements of the ACP, you should first contact the Office of Victim Advocate by calling 800-563-6399 or emailing RA-PMOVA-ACPPROGRAM@pa.gov. The ACP Victim Assistance Coordinator will attempt to work with the school to resolve the issue and ensure compliance. If the school continues to use a participant's confidential address or refuses to cooperate with the requirements of the law, then the Office of Victim Advocate may contact the school district's legal department to resolve the issue on your behalf. If the school district does not resolve the problem, the matter may be escalated to the Pennsylvania Victim Advocate for further action.

The Education Law Center-PA (ELC-PA) is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, community engagement, and policy advocacy, ELC-PA advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, multilingual learners, LGBTQ+ youth, children experiencing homelessness, and children at the intersection of multiple underserved identities.

ELC-PA's publications provide a general statement of the law. However, each situation is different. If questions remain about how the law applies to a particular situation, contact ELC-PA's Helpline for information and advice – visit www.elc-pa.org/contact or call 215-238-6970 (Eastern and Central PA) or 412-258-2120 (Western PA) – or contact another attorney of your choice.

¹ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6701.

² 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6704.

³ Office of Victim Advocate, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Address Confidentiality Program, <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/ova/address-confidentiality> (last visited June 25, 2026).

⁴ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6703(b).

⁵ Matthew Toth, State program can keep victims' home address from abusers: What residents should know, Lebanon Daily News (Mar. 6, 2023), <https://www.ldnews.com/story/news/local/2023/03/06/pennsylvania-program-can-keep-victims-home-address-from-abusers/69958636007/>.

- ⁶ Phone Interview with J.R. Waltemyer (Victim Assistance Coordinator, Office of Victim Advocate) (April 2, 2026) (providing updated statistics).
- ⁷ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6704.
- ⁸ Corrine Hays, Ylisse Yepez, Hurley Riley & Todd I. Herrenkohl, *Advancing the Use of Restorative Practices to Lessen Inequities in Punitive Discipline and Build Safe, Inclusive, and Nurturing Learning Environments for Traumatized Students*, 16 BEHAV. SCI. 968 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs16060968>.
- ⁹ Mawule A. Sevon, *Schooling While Black: Analyzing the Racial School Discipline Crisis for Behavior Analysts*, 15 BEHAV. ANALYSIS PRAC. 1247 (2022), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9744995/>; see also Russell J. Skiba, Robert S. Michael, Abra Carroll Nardo & Reece L. Peterson, *The Color of Discipline: Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportionality in School Punishment*, 34 URB. REV. 317 (2002).
- ¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About adverse childhood experiences. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>.
- ¹¹ Corrine Hays, Ylisse Yepez, Hurley Riley & Todd I. Herrenkohl, *Advancing the Use of Restorative Practices to Lessen Inequities in Punitive Discipline and Build Safe, Inclusive, and Nurturing Learning Environments for Traumatized Students*, 16 BEHAV. SCI. 968 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs16060968>.
- ¹² *Id.* See Michele Lloyd, *Domestic Violence and Education: Examining the Impact of Domestic Violence on Young Children, Children, and Young People and the Potential Role of Schools*, 9 FRONTIERS PSYCH. 2094 (2018), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6243007/>.
- ¹³ See, e.g., The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, *Trauma Facts for Educators* (Oct. 2008), https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/trauma_facts_for_educators.pdf; Mary A. Kernic et al., *Academic and School Health Issues Among Children Exposed to Maternal Intimate Partner Abuse*, National Library of Medicine, 156 ARCHIVES OF PEDIATRIC & ADOLESCENT MED. 549 (2002), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12038886/>.
- ¹⁴ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Request a Protection Order for Crime Victims, <https://www.pa.gov/services/pcv/request-a-protection-order-for-crime-victims> (last visited June 25, 2026).
- ¹⁵ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6706(b).
- ¹⁶ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6706(c).
- ¹⁷ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6706(d).
- ¹⁸ Pennsylvania’s Address Confidentiality Program—New Tool for Victims of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking, 65 Pa. Ass’n Prob. Parole & Corrections J. 1, 9 (2007).
- ¹⁹ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6708; 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6711(c).
- ²⁰ Joint State Gov’t Comm’n, Gen. Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *The Truancy Process: The Challenge of Improving Attendance in Pennsylvania Schools* (Apr. 2024), [https://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/resources/documents/ftp/publications/2024-04-09%20\(Act138\)%20Truancy%20Web%204.9.24%20930am.pdf](https://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/resources/documents/ftp/publications/2024-04-09%20(Act138)%20Truancy%20Web%204.9.24%20930am.pdf).
- ²¹ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6708.
- ²² 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6708(3).
- ²³ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6708(1).
- ²⁴ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6709(a).
- ²⁵ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6710(b).
- ²⁶ 23 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 6710(c)(4)-(6).
- ²⁷ Every Students Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6311 and 6312.
- ²⁸ 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(G); See Nat’l Ctr. for Homeless Educ., *Confirming Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Rights and Services* (Aug. 2017), <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/conf-elig.pdf>.
- ²⁹ *Id.*
- ³⁰ *Id.*
- ³¹ 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(i).
- ³² *Id.*