
Professional Judgment: Special and Unusual Circumstances

At San Bernardino Valley College (SBVC), we recognize that students and their families may experience significant life changes that impact their ability to pay for college. In these cases, students may request a Professional Judgment (PJ) review by connecting with the Financial Aid Office and submitting required documentation.

Professional Judgment allows financial aid administrators to make adjustments to a student's FAFSA or California Dream Act Application (CADAA) information—or their Cost of Attendance (COA)—on a case-by-case basis when special or unusual circumstances are present.

Special Circumstances

These are significant changes in a family's financial situation that may not be reflected on the FAFSA/CADAA. Examples include:

- Loss of employment or reduction in income
- Separation or divorce
- Death of a spouse or parent
- Loss of untaxed income or benefits
- Disability or hardship due to a natural disaster

In cases of special circumstances, SBVC will typically use a 12-month projected income to determine the most accurate financial picture for the current aid year.

Note: For the 2025–2026 aid year, the original FAFSA/CADAA uses 2023 income. Students must have a valid FAFSA/CADAA transaction on file before a Professional Judgment can be reviewed. If selected for verification, this must be completed prior to the PJ review.

Unusual Circumstances (Dependency Override)

Unusual circumstances involve family dynamics that prevent a student from obtaining parental information. In these cases, a Dependency Override may be considered to change a student's status from dependent to independent.

Examples of qualifying situations include:

- Abandonment by parents
- Parental incarceration
- Abuse or neglect
- Refugee, asylee, or homeless status
- To request a dependency override, students must submit a Professional Judgment: Unusual Circumstances (Dependency Override Appeal) via Smart Forms (Campus Logic), which includes:
- A personal statement detailing the situation
- Supporting documentation (e.g., letters from third-party professionals such as counselors, teachers, pastors, or case workers; court orders; police reports)

The following situations do not qualify for a dependency override:

- Parents refuse to provide financial support
- Parents are unwilling to provide FAFSA/CADAA information
- Student is not claimed on a parent's taxes
- Student is financially self-sufficient

Beginning with the 2024–2025 award year, schools must carry forward prior approved dependency overrides, unless the student’s situation has changed.

How to Request a Professional Judgment

Students can request a PJ review through **Smart Forms** (CampusLogic), our secure online financial aid system.

Log in and select the appropriate form for your aid year:

- Professional Judgment: Special Circumstances (SAI Appeal)
- Professional Judgment: Unusual Circumstances (Dependency Override Appeal)

Smart Forms allows you to upload documentation and sign forms electronically from any device.

Final Notes

- All Professional Judgment decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.
- Submission of a request does not guarantee an adjustment.
- All decisions are final and cannot be appealed.
- Students are responsible for submitting complete and timely documentation.

If you believe you may qualify for a Professional Judgment, please contact the SBVC Financial Aid Office to explore your options.