

NEW PROCESS BENEFITS VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING SEEKING COLLEGE AID

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Victims of human trafficking who cooperate with law enforcement officials to prosecute traffickers will benefit from a new, streamlined process to apply for and receive federal financial aid for postsecondary education, announced today by U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings.

“Education can offer a new start to those who have been freed from human trafficking,” Spellings said. “I am pleased our new process will enable these individuals to apply for and receive federal student aid.”

Globally, more than 600,000 men, women and children are forced into slavery each year according to U.S. government statistics. In the United States, only victims who are willing to aid law enforcement in the prosecution of traffickers (who often include members of criminal organizations) may be eligible for benefits under most federal and state aid programs.

Currently, more than 900 individuals appear on the U.S. registry of trafficking victims certified as eligible for assistance. Under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (VTVPA), these persons are eligible for most federal and state aid programs, including federal student aid. The spouse, child or parent of a certified individual may also qualify for these benefits.

The U.S. Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services (HHS), Homeland Security (DHS) and Education are involved in confirming eligibility for federal student financial assistance for human trafficking victims. These four agencies have joined in the collaborative effort announced today to create the new approval process.

With four agencies involved, the data match previously needed to confirm eligibility was cumbersome and complex. Under the new process, the financial aid officer at the school that the student plans to attend can work solely with a designated office in HHS to certify the applicant’s eligibility for federal student aid.

More information about the new process is being made available on the Education Department’s Web site at: www.studentaid.ed.gov.

“The Bush Administration is committed to helping victims of abuse,” Spellings said, “With this new process, we are turning commitment into action, providing victims of human trafficking with the assistance they need to achieve a better and brighter future.”