

MT One Stop

Student Services and Admissions Center 210
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
O: 615-898-2111 F: 615-904-8423
www.mtsu.edu/one-stop



January 31, 2024

Attention: Vermont House Committee on Education

Good morning, everyone. My name is Becca Smitty. I am the Director of the MT One Stop (Enrollment Services) at Middle Tennessee State University. Our institution has housed a single point of contact (SPOC) for homeless and former foster students since 2008. The program, Next Step, served as the model program for TN HB 1000 in 2019 and I have included a copy of that bill, now law, for your review. I have also included a copy of our Program Manual, which provides a how-to guide on creating this position at any school. This tool has been used to train all higher education liaisons in the state of Tennessee.

Students from homeless and foster care backgrounds face barriers in transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education that the typical student may not, including barriers to financial aid, college retention, and college completion. While in high school, these students can obtain assistance from their school district homeless liaison. Every school district in the country has a homeless liaison providing a wide variety of support to students, including helping connect them to community resources, helping them with their FAFSA, and supporting them through high school graduation and with the transition into higher ed.

Unfortunately, once the students leave high school and go on to college, they do not typically have that SPOC. College can be a scary transition for any student, but it is especially so for our homeless and former foster students. Most are the first in their family to go to college. Many do not have any stable adult in their lives providing them with advice or support. They struggle to find resources on campus and in their communities. Without support, many will not finish college.

Identifying SPOC liaisons on college campuses does not require colleges or universities to spend additional money. It does, however, provide these students with a place to go with questions and to connect to available resources to help them stay in college and complete a degree.

At MTSU, our liaison is housed in our MT One Stop and trained in all areas of Enrollment Management. Our overall year-to-year retention rate for our program is higher than the institution's statistics. We also boast a higher persistence/graduation rate (72%!). Students in our program get one-on-one assistance from the beginning, starting with the admissions process all the way through to graduation. To highlight a few important benefits of a SPOC, I wanted to mention some high-level reasons to support this position for your schools:

1. Enrollment security. Every student adds to the bottom line.
2. This position helps to humanize the college experience as the student progresses. The SPOC may be the only person that knows the struggle the student endured to get here.

3. A background in counseling, social work, or human sciences aids in understanding of trauma impact and how to go about empowering students.
4. Students are provided a “guidance counselor” for college. Someone who has an internal perspective with knowledge of how to navigate the transition to college.
5. Trauma Informed Care is vital to helping a student feel valued, informed, and able to advocate for themselves and their situation.
6. Community resource aware so that the student can access the local opportunities if necessary.
7. The “Whole Student” approach helps the student, the campus community, and ultimately the society at large when the student matriculates and becomes a contributing member of society.
8. This position has the ability to impact the campus community by making the student body aware and sensitive to those around them. It makes for a more educated and inclusive environment.

The benefits of having a liaison in place are both tangible and indefinite. As you can see in the Program Manual, and no matter the size of your student population, there are key offices and players across the campus that a position of this magnitude can be housed or created at no additional cost. Our program has grown so much in the last 16 years that we even have private donors secured to assist with the monetary needs of this student population. Ideally, every program can get to that point. And to be honest, with the world today, who couldn’t use a little extra help to get through the challenges our students face? I encourage you to support this action to help break the cycle of homelessness and abandonment this population often endures. With your support, these students can succeed!

Thank you for your support and time today.

Becca Smitty, MS, CFLE

Becca Smitty, MS, CFLE
Middle Tennessee State University
Becca.Smitty@mtsu.edu
www.mtsu.edu/nextstep