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California Legislature

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Assembly Bill 2766: Improving Foster and Homeless Student Success through Priority Housing and Enrollment

SUMMARY

AB 2766 would improve college access and support for foster youth and students experiencing homelessness by expanding priority housing, streamlining identification and transparency in housing processes, deferring or waiving upfront housing fees, and aligning priority registration with support programs.

BACKGROUND

California law designates three public higher education systems: the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California. To support foster youth, the NextUp program offers additional resources at selected community colleges, and state law provides priority enrollment for foster youth and former foster youth up to age 25 at the California State University, the California Community Colleges, and, by agreement, the University of California.

Additionally, existing law ensures that current and former foster youth and homeless youth receive priority for student housing at public colleges and universities. These students also receive additional priority for year-round or break housing, further addressing housing insecurity and supporting student success.

Foster youth and students experiencing homelessness encounter substantial barriers in higher education, leading to significantly lower college completion rates compared to their peers. Only 12 percent of foster youth and 15 percent of students who experience homelessness in kindergarten through grade twelve complete a two-year or four-year degree by age 29, compared to 49 percent of the general student population. Factors such as housing instability and limited access to required courses are major contributors to these disparities, with nearly half of foster youth experiencing homelessness while attending community college.

PROBLEM

The University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems are required to provide priority housing to current and former foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, supporting their access to stable accommodations and enabling them to focus on their academic goals. However, California Community Colleges (CCCs), which enroll the majority of foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, are not subject to this requirement. This results in unequal access to stable housing, even as community college housing capacity has grown.

Many campuses also lack consistent processes for identifying eligible students in housing applications and do not clearly advertise priority-housing information. Consequently, students may miss out on important support or be forced to repeatedly disclose their foster care or homelessness history. Additionally, housing application fees and deposits are often required months before financial aid is disbursed, creating significant barriers for students with limited financial resources and, in some cases, preventing them from enrolling.

Furthermore, while foster youth are eligible for priority registration until age 25, according to the California Community College Chancellor's Office, about 900 students in the NextUp foster youth support program are over age 25. This creates a gap where students can receive support services but lose priority registration, limiting their ability to enroll in required courses and complete their degrees on time.

SOLUTION

AB 2766 would address barriers faced by foster youth and students experiencing homelessness in higher education through several targeted measures. It would require California Community Colleges to provide priority housing for current and former foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, ensuring these

students have greater access to stable accommodations. The bill would also require both CCC and CSU campuses, and request that UC campuses, to identify eligible foster and homeless students in housing applications and clearly publicize priority housing benefits on their websites, increasing transparency and awareness of available supports.

Additionally, AB 2766 would require CCC and CSU campuses, and request UC campuses, to defer or waive housing deposits and fees until after financial aid is disbursed for eligible students. The bill would also align priority registration eligibility with the NextUp program to help foster youth access required courses and complete their degrees on time.

SUPPORT

John Burton Advocates for Youth (Co-sponsor)
Student Homes Coalition (Co-sponsor)
uAspire (Co-sponsor)
UC Student Association (Co-sponsor)
Alliance for a Better Community
Alliance for Children's Rights
Allies for Every Child
Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California
Aspiranet
ASUCD Housing and Transportation Advocacy Committee
Bill Wilson Center
Cal Poly Humboldt Elite Scholars Program
California Alliance of Caregivers
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Community College Chancellor's Office
California Court Appointed Special Advocate Association
California Federation of Teachers
California Youth Connection
Chabot College NextUp-Guardian Scholars Program
Children Now
Children Youth and Family Collaborative
Children's Law Center of California
College Democrats at UC Irvine
College For All Coalition
Corona Norco Unified School District
County of Santa Clara
Davis College Democrats
Depaul USA
Educating Students Together
Everychild Foundation
Faculty Association at California Community Colleges
Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley
Foster and Homeless Youth College Housing Authority
Foster Youth Pre-College Collective
Gavilan College NextUp
Generation Up
Hope Elementary School District
Independent Living Program at Woodland Community College
Indivisible CA StateStrong
Institute for College Access and Success
Journey House
Latino and Latina Roundtable of the San Gabriel and Pomona Valley
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
Los Angeles Unified School District
Marin County Office of Education
National Center for Youth Law
NextGen California
Ohlone College NextUp
Orange County United Way
Oxnard College – EOPS
Pasadena City College Next UP
Public Advocates
Public Counsel
Rowland Unified School District Family Resource Center
Sacramento County Office of Education
San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
Sen Bernardino Valley College Guardian Scholars
San Diego City College – NextUp Program
Santa Clara County Office of Education
Santa Cruz County Office of Education
Santa Rose Junior College GSP/NextUp
SchoolHouse Connection
Stepping Forward LA
Student Homes at SJSU
Student Homes at UCLA
Student Homes at UCSB
Student Homes at UCSD
Student Senate for California Community Colleges
UC Davis Guardian Scholars
UC Riverside Foster Youth Support Services
UCLA CalKIDS Institute
United Friends of the Children
University Housing Rights Organization at UC Berkeley
University of California
Urban Studies Student Association
YouthBridge Housing