

Senate Bill 228

Supporting Foster Youth in Community College

Senator Connie M. Leyva (D-Chino)

SUMMARY

Senate Bill 228 will allow greater access to higher education for current and former foster youth by strengthening an existing program for foster youth attending California's community colleges.

BACKGROUND

Children and youth typically enter foster care due to serious abuse and neglect. This trauma is often compounded by the instability they experience while in foster care, through placement and school changes. Together, these lead to poor educational outcomes, most notably low rates of college completion: just eight percent obtain a degree by age 26 as compared to 46 percent of the same-age non-foster youth population.

In 2014, this serious educational disparity led the California State Legislature to pass SB 1023 (Liu), which established a special program for foster youth enrolled in community college, known as NextUp. This program is in place at 45 community colleges, serving 2,600 current and former foster youth annually. NextUp provides a comprehensive array of services to promote college retention and degree attainment. Students must have been in foster care after the age of 16, be under age 26 and be enrolled in a minimum of nine units to participate. While the NextUp program has been very effective, several barriers to access have been identified that create challenges for foster youth attempting to pursue a postsecondary credential.

This bill will make common sense changes to address these barriers, including modifying eligibility so that students who were in foster care after age 13 may participate, creating flexibility around income requirements for students transitioning from full-time employment to school, specifying that existing funds can be used to provide support to enrolled students as they are matriculating, and clarifying that programs should create streamlined systems for application and entry. This bill also expands eligibility for priority enrollment at UC, CSU, and CCCs to conform to the related question for financial aid, as well as the NextUp program.

PROBLEM

Foster youth face several barriers to accessing the NextUp program, which further exacerbates challenges for foster youth attempting to pursue a postsecondary degree or certificate.

SOLUTION

SB 228 removes these barriers by modifying eligibility to enable students who were in foster care after age 13 to participate, creating flexibility around income requirements for students transitioning from full-time employment to school, specifying that existing funds can be used to provide support to enrolled students as they are matriculating, and clarifying that programs should create streamlined systems for application and entry.

STATUS

Introduced – January 15, 2021

SUPPORT

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