



Senator Angelique V. Ashby, 8th Senate District
Senate Majority Leader Mike McGuire, 2nd Senate District

SB 307 – Fostering Futures

Increasing Access and Improving College Affordability for Foster Youth

SUMMARY

SB 307, jointly authored by Senator Ashby and Senate Majority Leader McGuire, seeks to make debt free college a reality for foster youth in California. To do this, SB 307 expands the Middle Class Scholarship (MCS) program to allow foster youth enrolled in an associate's degree, transfer pathway, or career technical education certificate program at a community college or a four-year program at a CSU or UC to have 100% of their unmet need covered, including books, food, and lodging, after other aid is applied.

BACKGROUND

Children and youth enter foster care due to serious abuse and neglect, and this trauma is often compounded by the instability they experience while in foster care – through placement and school changes. One third of students in foster care change schools at least once during the school year – four times the rate of other student populations. Additional research has found that foster youth attend on average twice as many schools between the ninth and twelfth grades as their peers.

Foster youth also experience extremely high rates of housing insecurity, which can lead to instability that permeates to other areas of adulthood. A 2019 analysis by the Student Aid Commission found that 56% of community college students in California lived with their parents. Families play an important role in the housing stability of their adult children, in particular those attending college. Foster youth, by definition, have been removed from their parents and therefore are less likely to have a parental home to fall back on. This is further borne out by research on homelessness among college students that has shown that the rate of homelessness among former foster youth (43%) is more than double that of other students (19%).

To close this gap, Senator Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley), when she was in the Assembly, authored a bill to ensure college campuses provided stable housing for current and former foster youth during the summer months and school breaks. AB 1393,

which was eventually signed into law, required the CSU's and requested the California Community Colleges and the UC's to give priority to current and former foster youth for campus housing for uninterrupted year-round occupation or for occupation most days of the calendar year. However, more can be done to ensure foster youth that cannot afford college dormitories or their own living arrangements are still able to attend a community college, four-year program, or a career technical education certificate program.

These experiences of instability, oftentimes combined, lead to poor educational outcomes, most notably low rates of college completion: in California, 93% of foster youth say they want to attend college, but only 4% of former foster youth will obtain their bachelor's degree by 26, compared to 50% of their peers, who are non-foster youth.

California has been making strides to improve access to financial aid for foster youth, but more can be done. Currently, California offers the Chafee Education and Training Voucher, which provides up to \$5,000 annually to eligible foster youth, as well as a \$6,000 Cal Grant award for non-tuition costs. However, even with these investments, the state's financial aid program has not kept pace with significant increases to the cost of living for students, and foster youth are among those hit hardest by this disparity.

Recognizing the college affordability crisis impacts college students more broadly, the state revamped the Middle Class Scholarship (MCS) in 2021 to become the first state financial aid program for which award amounts are linked to students unmet need, including non-tuition costs such as housing, food, and transportation.

THE PROBLEM

The MCS, while a major step towards addressing equity gaps in college access, falls short of serving the needs of foster youth. The MCS requires students to contribute towards the cost of attendance through work or savings. For many foster youth,

who have neither an emotional or financial safety net in place, successfully balancing a full-time course load and part time work is not a reasonable expectation.

THE SOLUTION

While the vision of the MCS is to one day enable all Californians to access debt-free higher education by covering student's unmet needs, the shortfalls of the program leave foster youth with an additional funding gap that continues to make higher education extremely inaccessible.

SB 307 seeks to fill the gaps of need by establishing the Fostering Futures program within the existing MCS program to do the following:

- Expand eligibility for the MCS program to foster youth enrolled in an associate's degree, transfer pathway, or career technical education certificate program at a community college – the current MCS program only applies to UC's and CSU's, or a bachelor's degree program at some community colleges;
- Remove the student contribution requirement towards the cost of attendance for foster youth in UC's, CSU's, and community college associate's degrees, transfer, or certificate programs;
- Cover 100% of foster youth's remaining unmet need after other resources are applied for UC's, CSU's, and community college associate's degrees or certificate programs.

Completion of a four-year degree, while a major milestone, does not mark the end of a foster youth scholar's journey – but rather a new beginning. SB 307 serves to both increase the likelihood that foster youth can reach their educational goals and also better prepare them to enter the next stage of their lives, whether that involves pursuing an advanced degree or entering directly into their chosen career path, by providing the opportunity to begin their next chapter debt-free from higher education.

SUPPORT

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