



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 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 for foster youth enrolled in an associate's degree, transfer pathway, or 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 for books, food, and lodging, after other aid is applied.

BACKGROUND

Children and youth 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: 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 the same age, 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 Grant Program, 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 that 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 on 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 possible.

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

THE SOLUTION

Building upon the Governor's vision for debt-free college for all students, SB 307 would establish the Fostering Futures program within the existing MCS program to do the following for foster youth:

- Expand eligibility to foster youth enrolled in an associate's degree, transfer pathway, or certificate program at a community college
- Remove the student contribution requirement towards the cost of attendance
- Cover 100% of remaining unmet need after other federal, state, and institutional aid
- Allow students to participate regardless of high school performance

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

John Burton Advocates for Youth (sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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