



May 22, 2023

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review
Committee
1021 O Street, Room 8630
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting Chair,
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
1021 O Street, Room 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable John Laird
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1
1021 O Street, Suite 8720
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Kevin McCarty,
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
1021 O Street, Suite 4510
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Trailer bill language to create debt-free college for California's foster youth

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committees,

A statewide coalition of the undersigned organizations led by John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) expresses their support for inclusion of trailer bill language that provides for the full cost of attendance for foster youth enrolled in a Cal State University, University of California, or California Community College, utilizing funding from the Middle Class Scholarship and Student Success Completion Grant (SSCG) programs. It is also imperative that foster youth attending community college are not required to enroll full time in order to access the financial aid necessary to succeed in college.

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 just 10 percent obtain a two- or four-year degree by the age of 23 compared to 36 percent of their non-foster youth peers. Financial aid has been cited as key to improving degree attainment. For example, a recent study from the Urban Institute found that foster youth who receive a Chafee Education and Training Voucher are *twice as likely* to graduate as those who did not.

California has been making strides to improve access to financial aid for foster youth. 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. One study found that the most common reason foster youth chose not to attend college was because of affordability and their need to work. Further, there is evidence of a direct relationship between number of hours worked and the likelihood of dropping out of school for students with foster care experience.

Students with experience in the foster care system face unique challenges that impact their ability to succeed at college when required to attend full-time, despite the availability of financial incentives. Currently, only 49% of all foster youth attending community college take 12 or more units. These challenges include increased rates of parenting students, high rates of school mobility leading to academic deficiencies in college and high rates of disability. Over one in five youth in foster care has been diagnosed with a disability, almost three times the rate of the general population. Therefore, it is imperative that foster youth attending community college are not required to enroll full time in order to access the financial aid necessary to succeed in college. While a reduction in the required unit load for this population to receive SSCG means that the time to degree completion may extend beyond two years, expanding the availability of SSCG funds to provide debt-free college to foster youth will still serve the core goal of the SSCG program, which is to reduce overall time to degree completion by allowing these students to increase their enrollment intensity.

Inclusion of this trailer bill language will increase college completion rates for foster youth and allow these students to reach their higher educational goals debt-free.

Sincerely,

Debbie Raucher, Director of Education
John Burton Advocates for Youth (sponsor)

Kristin Johnson, Executive Assistant
3rd Street Youth Center & Clinic

Michaela Lantin, Placement Specialist
A Better Way, Inc.

Vanetta Johnson, Executive Director
Beyond Emancipation

Vance Edwards, Program Coordinator
Butte College

Jennifer Rexroad, Executive Director
California Alliance of Caregivers

Ludivina Snow, Director, Toro Guardian Scholars
Toro Guardian Scholars, Cal State University Dominguez Hills



Danielle Wondra, Senior Policy & Outreach Associate, Child Welfare
Children Now

Jeff Baker, Vice President, Student Services
College of the Desert

Jenna Bethancourt, THP Director
EA Family Services

Annette Kunzman, President
FASD Network of Southern California

Annette Kunzman, Member
FASD Now!

Jeanne Pritzker, President
Foster Care Counts

Davina Polanco, Executive Director
Haven of Hope

Eric Hubbard, Director of Development & Strategic Partnerships
Jovenes, Inc.

Daniela McCarson, Dean, Special Funded Programs
Norco College

Meredith Curry Nuñez, Executive Director
Northern California College Promise Coalition

Matt Bell, Chief Executive Officer
Pivotal

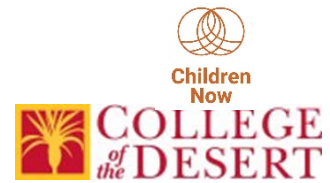
Vimal Srivastava, President
Power to Soar Foundation

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Russell Castañeda Calleros, Director of Government and Community Relations
Río Hondo College

Stacy Raphael, Director of Basic Needs
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San Joaquin County Youth Action Board



Barbara Duffield, Executive Director
SchoolHouse Connection



Rachel Carr, Child Protective Services Social Worker
Sonoma County Family Youth and Children



Veli Waller, Senior Manager of College Success
Students Rising Above



Julissa Castillo, EVP of Contracts
Together We Rise DBA. Foster Love



Angela Carter-Blackshear, Chief Operating Officer
United Friends of the Children



Adam Gottlieb, Director, Postsecondary Strategy & Policy
UNITE-LA



Bridget Alexander, Executive Director
Waking the Village



Nicamer Tolentino, Executive Director
Wind Youth Services



Patricia Barahona, Chief Executive Officer
Youth Leadership Institute



Cherie Schroeder, Program Director
Woodland Community College / Foster & Kinship Care
Education & Independent Living Program



Cc: Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Chris Francis, Consultant, Senate Budget Committee
Andrew Medina, Office of Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins
Chris Woods, Office of Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins
Jean-Marie McKinney, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus
Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
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Jake Brymner, California Student Aid Commission