January 31, 2024

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
California State Governor
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Proposed Elimination of Housing Supports for Foster Youth

Dear Governor Newsom,

The undersigned coalition of organizations are writing to express concern about two budget cuts included in your Administration’s proposed 2024-25 budget that will increase homelessness among foster youth. These include $18.8 million (General Fund, ongoing) for the Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) Supplement and $13.7 million (General Fund, ongoing) for the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program.

The SILP Supplement was included in the FY 23-24 budget. It will provide a supplementary payment to foster youth placed in a SILP, based on the cost of housing in the county where they live. These young people currently receive $1,206 monthly for all living expenses: rent, food, utilities, clothing, transportation and more. Given this low rate and escalating housing costs, 1 in 5 current foster youth in California have at least one episode of homelessness between ages 18 and 21.

The Legislature and your Administration adopted the SILP Supplement for several reasons. First, it recognized the unique responsibility that California has to youth in foster care, who were placed into foster care through no fault of their own. The Legislature and Administration also understood that experiencing homelessness as a youth or young adult increases the likelihood of being chronically homeless as an adult. Finally, the policy was adopted because it achieves the important goal of reducing homelessness among youth in foster care by leveraging federal funding.

The undersigned organizations support the foster care rate reforms underway. However, their focus is on ensuring foster children and youth in family settings receive the correct level of care, such as mental health counseling. They do not address the housing affordability crisis experienced uniquely by young people who live in a SILP and they do not address the needs of young adults in foster care living independently.
The second proposed reduction of concern is the elimination of the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program, which pays for supportive services for 1,300 foster youth who have a federal housing voucher specifically for former foster youth. These vouchers are known as Family Unification Program (FUP) and Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers.

Prior to the creation and expansion of the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program, these federal vouchers were underutilized in California because there was not a source of public funding to provide the required supportive services. Since the creation and expansion of the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program, the number of vouchers has increased 54% in California, bringing $22 million in federal investment to California annually. The effectiveness of this expansion is one key reason why homelessness among transition-age youth has decreased 16% between 2020 and 2023. If this program is eliminated, this effective state/federal partnership will come to a halt and put 1,300 youth at risk of homelessness.

We appreciate the complexity of the state budget and the need to responsibly steward scarce public resources. However, we request that your Administration sustain its long-standing commitment to children and youth in foster care by revisiting these decisions and maintaining these important state investments.

Thank you for all you have done for the children and youth of California. We look forward to ongoing dialogue about these important issues in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

John Burton Advocates for Youth
Alameda County Office of Education
Aldea
All Saints Church Foster Care Project
Alliance for Children’s Rights
Allies for Every Child
Alternative Family Services
Aspiranet
Association of Community Human Services
Better Youth, Inc.
Beyond Emancipation
Bill Wilson Center
Butterfly’s Haven
California Alliance of Caregivers
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California State Association of Counties
California Youth Connection
Robles, LLC
Sacramento County Executive Office
Safe Place for Youth
San Benito County Health and Human Services Agency
San Bernardino County Administrator’s Office
Sanctuary of Hope LA
Santa Ana Housing Authority
A Sense of Home
Seneca Family of Agencies
Silegra
Specialty Family Foundation
StarVista
Stepping Forward LA
Students Rising Above
Sycamores
Tha Hood Healers
Unity Care
Waking the Village
Walden Family Services
Wellnest
Whole Person Learning
Urban Health, Inc.
Urban Strategies Council
Youth and Family Programs

Cc: Members, Senate Budget Committee
    Members, Assembly Budget Committee
    Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
    Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 4
    Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
    Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5
    Chris Woods, Office of the Senate Pro Tempore
    Mareva Brown, Office of the Senate Pro Tempore
    Jason Sisney, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
    Kelsy Castillo, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
    Jessica Bartholow, Office of Senator Skinner
    Tania Dikho, Office of Assemblymember Ting
    Bethany Renfree, Office of Senator Durazo
    Elizabeth Schmitt, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
    Timothy Griffiths, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 4
    Nicole Vasquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
    Genevieve Morelos, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5
    Chantelle Denny, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
    Megan De Sousa, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
    Diana Boyer, County Welfare Directors Association of California
    Rosie McCool, Chief Probation Officers of California
    Justin Garrett, California State Association of Counties
    Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst’s Office