

## Legislative Proposal to Support Homeless and Foster Youth in Education

### BACKGROUND

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In California, roughly 225,000 K-12 students experience homelessness each year and over 46,000 are in foster care. Research shows that these students face immense obstacles in attaining a high school diploma and successfully matriculating to higher education. Statewide data from the 2021-22 academic year indicate that only 61.4% of foster youth and 72.9% of homeless youth successfully complete high school within four years compared to 87% of the general student population and 84.5% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Similarly, foster and homeless students are significantly more likely to experience school instability, chronic absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion. These concerning data have long-lasting implications for these students. Just 10.8% of foster youth complete a 2- or 4-year degree by age 23 as compared to 36% of their peers. Among 18- to 25-year-old youth experiencing homelessness, the likelihood of completing any college credits is half that of other students.

### THIS PROPOSAL

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John Burton Advocates for Youth and the National Center for Youth Law propose to address these outcomes through several key policy changes that will utilize existing resources to increase direct support for students, streamline services through better collaboration, and reduce gaps in financial aid application completion. Specifically, the provisions will:

- 1. Expand the ability of Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCPs) to provide direct student support.** Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCPs) operate within County Offices of Education and serve a crucial role in coordinating between LEAs and county child welfare agencies to enhance the identification and enrollment of students in foster care, uphold the unique educational rights of foster youth, and improve their high school graduation and college enrollment rates. The current statutory framework restricts FYSCPs from providing direct services to foster youth students unless LEAs certify in writing that they are “unable, using any other state, federal, local, or private funds, to provide the direct services” being offered by FYSCPs. While well-intentioned, this requirement has proven to be a barrier to foster youth students receiving essential services like tutoring, mentoring, and counseling. Many LEAs are reluctant to provide written certification that they cannot address the needs of foster youth resulting in FYSCPs having to forgo providing these services, even when clearly indicated and when funding is available to do so. Allowing FYSCPs to offer direct services without requiring written approval from LEAs will ensure that more foster youth have access to personalized and intensive support, ultimately increasing their chances of successfully completing high school and transitioning to postsecondary education.
- 2. Require LEAs to provide a copy of foster youth students’ FAFSA/CADAA “opt-out forms” to the county FYSCP.** Under existing law, FYSCPs are responsible for coordinating the completion of financial aid applications for high school seniors in foster care. However, the current “All In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act” requirements permit parents, legal guardians, students who are 18 years or older, and LEAs to “opt-out” of FAFSA/CADAA completion obligations on behalf of students. Foster youth are among those most likely to not receive proper guidance regarding how to make such a crucial choice. By requiring LEAs to disclose to FYSCPs which foster youth have “opted-out,” FYSCPs can design tailored interventions and offer additional support to ensure that foster youth make informed decisions regarding financial aid and postsecondary education. This will also allow FYSCPs to comply with existing statutory mandates related to FAFSA/CADAA completion.
- 3. Close loopholes in the LCAP process to ensure the needs of homeless students are addressed.** California’s LCAP process provides a framework for districts to describe their overarching goals for supporting students. Changes made last year require LEAs to include activities in their LCAP for any student group with substandard outcomes. Homeless students, however, are frequently under-identified, which could lead to these students being overlooked. This proposal would close this loophole by requiring LEAs who may be under-identifying this population to address their identification strategies in their LCAP in consultation with their designated McKinney-Vento homeless liaison.