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Assembly
California Legislature

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Assembly Bill 2766: Improving Foster and Homeless Student Success through Priority Housing and Enrollment

SUMMARY

AB 2766 would improve college access and support for foster youth and students experiencing homelessness by expanding priority housing, streamlining identification and transparency in housing processes, deferring upfront housing fees, and aligning priority registration with support programs.

BACKGROUND

California law designates three public higher education systems: the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California. To support foster youth, the NextUp program offers additional resources at selected community colleges, and state law provides priority enrollment for foster youth and former foster youth up to age 25 at the California State University, the California Community Colleges, and, by agreement, the University of California.

Additionally, existing law ensures that current and former foster youth and homeless youth receive priority for student housing at public colleges and universities. These students also receive additional priority for year-round or break housing, further addressing housing insecurity and supporting student success.

Foster youth and students experiencing homelessness encounter substantial barriers in higher education, leading to significantly lower college completion rates compared to their peers. Only 12 percent of foster youth and 15 percent of students who experience homelessness in kindergarten through grade twelve complete a two-year or four-year degree by age 29, compared to 49 percent of the general student population. Factors such as housing instability and limited access to required courses are major contributors to these disparities, with nearly half of foster youth experiencing homelessness while attending community college.

PROBLEM

The University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems are required to provide priority housing to current and former foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, supporting their access to stable accommodations and enabling them to focus on their academic goals. However, California Community Colleges (CCCs), which enroll the majority of foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, are not subject to this requirement. This results in unequal access to stable housing, even as community college housing capacity has grown.

Many campuses also lack consistent processes for identifying eligible students in housing applications and do not clearly advertise priority-housing information. Consequently, students may miss out on important support or be forced to repeatedly disclose their foster care or homelessness history. Additionally, housing application fees and deposits are often required months before financial aid is disbursed, creating significant barriers for students with limited financial resources and, in some cases, preventing them from enrolling.

Furthermore, while foster youth are eligible for priority registration until age 25, according to the California Community College Chancellor's Office, about 900 students in the NextUp foster youth support program are over age 25. This creates a gap where students can receive support services but lose priority registration, limiting their ability to enroll in required courses and complete their degrees on time.

SOLUTION

AB 2766 would address barriers faced by foster youth and students experiencing homelessness in higher education through several targeted measures. It would require California Community Colleges to provide priority housing for current and former foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, ensuring these

students have greater access to stable accommodations. The bill would also require both CCC and CSU campuses, and request that UC campuses, to identify eligible foster and homeless students in housing applications and clearly publicize priority housing benefits on their websites, increasing transparency and awareness of available supports.

Additionally, AB 2766 would require CCC and CSU campuses, and request UC campuses, to defer housing deposits and fees until after financial aid is disbursed for eligible students. The bill would also align priority registration eligibility with the NextUp program to help foster youth access required courses and complete their degrees on time.

SUPPORT

John Burton Advocates for Youth (Sponsor)