Addressing Youth Homelessness in California

Legislative Staff Educational Lunch & Learn

October 20, 2026
11:45 AM – 1:00 PM
State Capitol, Room 317, Sacramento, CA

Program Overview

California has made measurable progress in reducing youth homelessness, but maintaining that progress depends on sustained, youth-specific investment. Between 2020 and 2025, youth homelessness statewide declined by 34%, largely driven by the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention Program. Yet nearly 9,000 unaccompanied Californians age 24 and younger who are raising more than 1,000 children remain homeless on a given night in the annual count.

Join John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY), homeless service providers, and youth leaders for an educational lunch and learn examining the policies and partnerships behind recent gains, the barriers that continue to leave young people without stable housing, and actionable opportunities to preserve and build on California's progress to end youth homelessness.

Accompanying Materials

- *JBAY Report: Investing in Impact: How State Investment Reduced Youth Homelessness in California*
- *JBAY Report: Project 3,500: How Two State Programs Increased Housing Supports for Former Foster Youth in California*

Agenda

I. Registration, Lunch & Networking | 11:45 AM – 12:00 PM

Attendees will gather, grab their lunches, and settle in.

II. Welcome & Opening Remarks | 12:00 PM – 12:05 PM

Sarah Pauter, Executive Director at JBAY and **Nick Hardeman**, Principal at Hardeman Strategies and Consulting and JBAY Board Member, will open the lunch and learn by establishing the legislative imperative to address youth homelessness and highlighting how targeted state investments help young people achieve stability.

III. The Evolution of California's Response to Youth Homelessness | 12:05 PM – 12:15 PM

Sarah Pauter will welcome legislative staff and trace how California's approach to youth homelessness has evolved through dedicated state funding, to where it stands today: a dual approach consisting of **preventative efforts** reaching foster youth paired with a **homelessness response safety net,** funded primarily through HHAP youth set-asides.

IV. How California Reduced Youth Homelessness and the Risks That Threaten Youth | 12:15 PM – 12:35 PM

AJ Johnson, JBAY Director of Housing & Economic Mobility, will moderate a panel with **Simone Tureck Lee**, JBAY Senior Director of Programs and Policy, **Deisy Madrigal**, a youth housing provider at Lutheran Social Services, and **young adult advocates**. Together, they will highlight the investments and approaches that reduced youth homelessness and explore the federal and state funding, policy, and data, and challenges that could reverse California's progress and undermine youth stability.

V. Opportunities to Address and Prevent Youth Homelessness | 12:35 PM – 12:40 PM

Sarah Pauter, JBAY Executive Director, will discuss a forward-looking view of federal and state budget outlooks and opportunities that could safeguard youth-specific funding, bolster affordable housing, and leverage existing state and local infrastructure aimed to end youth homelessness.

VI. Questions & Interactive Discussion | 12:40 PM – 1:00 PM

An open session moderated by **Nick Hardeman**, Principal at Hardeman Strategies and Consulting and JBAY Board Member, giving legislative staff the opportunity to engage directly with JBAY policy experts, young adult advocates, and frontline providers. Attendees are invited to discuss district-specific needs, evaluate solutions, and uplift strategies that support youth experiencing homelessness.

Event Contact & Inquiries

For questions or additional information, please contact **AJ Johnson**, Director of Housing & Economic Mobility at aj@jbay.org.

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Speaker Bios



Sarah Pauter, JBAY Executive Director, leverages personal and professional experience to advance JBAY's mission for young people who have experienced foster care or homelessness. A former foster youth, she previously led JBAY efforts to strengthen higher education policies for foster and homeless youth and holds degrees in social work and public policy.



Nick Hardeman, Principal at Hardeman Strategies and Consulting and a JBAY Board Member, has more than 20 years of experience in California government, including senior roles in both houses of the Legislature. As chief of staff to Senate Leader Toni Atkins, he served as a liaison to the Governor's Administration and State Assembly and was a lead negotiator on six state budgets and major policy legislation.



Simone Tureck Lee, JBAY Senior Director of Programs and Policy, has spent more than 20 years advancing the well-being of transition-age youth who have experienced foster care or homelessness in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, and statewide. She has been with the organization since 2009 and currently oversees JBAY's policy and programmatic work.



AJ Johnson, JBAY Director of Housing & Economic Mobility, leads policy activities that support children, youth, and young adults who experience foster care or homelessness. With more than 20 years in education, training, and policy, AJ has advanced initiatives spanning housing, public benefits, higher education, and holistic supports.



Cody Van Felden, JBAY Senior Project Associate, supports JBAY's programmatic work and leads its Young Adult Advocate Program. Drawing on lived experience, she advocates for foster youth and people who have experienced homelessness to advance housing stability, educational opportunity, and economic mobility.



Deisy Madrigal, Project Manager at Lutheran Social Services of Northern California, brings a background in behavioral health and works to prevent and address homelessness among young people in Sacramento. She has contributed to the region's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program planning and represented LSS when the Sacramento City Council recognized the organization's leadership in securing the initiative's federal grant.