ISSUE

In California, foster youth continue to struggle in higher education. By age 26, just 8 percent of former foster youth earn a bachelor’s degree as compared to 46 percent of the same-age population of young adults. Financial aid plays a key role in student’s success, yet for foster youth attending community college in California, just 40 percent of foster youth receive the Pell Grant and 11 percent receive the CalGrant, despite meeting income eligibility criteria for financial aid.

One of the primary barriers that foster youth students face is that many do not complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is the first step towards obtaining both state and federal financial aid. Many foster youth are left to navigate the complicated system without assistance, resulting in low completion rates.

BACKGROUND

Multiple studies have shown that financial aid receipt positively impacts grade point average, transfer rates and undergraduate degree attainment, making it an essential college completion tool for foster youth. Furthermore, research has identified low rates of financial aid receipt among foster youth as a key factor in the low rate of college success.

California’s foster care system has made important strides in the last several years to support older youth in foster care, including expanding access to financial aid, however significant achievement gaps still remain. One central barrier to improving rates of FAFSA completion among foster youth is that there is no state agency charged with ensuring this important task is completed.

Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCPs) provide support for post-secondary matriculation, however, coordination of FAFSA completion efforts is not specified as a requirement. As a result, the FAFSA is completed on an ad hoc basis and too often key deadlines are missed, errors are made and the FAFSA is not successfully submitted.

THIS BILL

SB 860 will clarify the role of FYSCPs to include coordination of efforts to support FAFSA completion among foster youth who are high school seniors. It will also add FAFSA completion rates to their bi-annual reporting requirement.

SUPPORT

John Burton Advocates for Youth (Sponsor)
National Center for Youth Law (Sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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