1. **What is the goal of Senate Bill 958?**

The goal of SB 958 is to make common sense changes to existing statute to better align the NextUp program with the needs of foster youth and to create consistency across programs and benefits available to foster youth so as to streamline access.

2. **What are the provisions of SB 958?**

The bill would make the following changes:

- Adjust the eligibility criteria for the NextUp program to allow students in foster care after the age of 13 to participate and to align eligibility for priority registration similarly,
- Create flexibility around income requirements for the NextUp program while prioritizing those with the lowest income,
- Clarify that programs should create streamlined systems for application and entry, and
- Specify that existing funds can be used to provide support to enrolled students as they are matriculating prior to the first day of classes.

3. **What is NextUp?**

The Next Up program was established by Senate Bill 1023 (Liu) in 2014 and funded by the California State Legislature in the 2015-16 budget. It is a campus-based support program for current and former foster youth. The statutory name given to the programs is the Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Services Program (CAFYES), however, once operational, the program was rebranded by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office as the NextUp program.

Participants receive a wide range of services, including matriculation and transfer counseling, monitoring of academic progress, tutoring, academic mentoring, counseling and mental health services, direct financial assistance and more.

4. **How many campuses operate NextUp programs and how many students participate in NextUp?**

There are currently 45 colleges that operate NextUp programs across the state. These programs serve a combined 1800 students annually. Nineteen of the programs are relatively new and service numbers are expected to grow in the coming years. Once at full capacity, based on current eligibility criteria, it is estimated that the programs will serve between 2,200 and 2,700 students annually.

5. **What are the current eligibility criteria to participate in NextUp?**

In order to participate in the program, a student must:
- Have been in foster on or after their 16th birthday
- Be enrolled in at least 9 semester units (or equivalent)
- Be under age 26
- Meet the criteria for California residency
- Qualify to receive a Board of Governors Fee Waiver pursuant to 5 CCR §58620(b)(1), or (2), or (3) with a calculated Expected Family Contribution of $0 (see question #9 for details).

6. What is the rationale for changing the minimum age required for a student to be in foster care in order to qualify for NextUp and priority registration?

To qualify for NextUp and priority registration currently, a student must have been in foster care on or after their 16\textsuperscript{th} birthday. NextUp staff have recognized that students with experience in foster care at ages younger than 16 often present with challenges as great or greater than those in foster care later in life. New data supports these observations. A 2018 study found that foster youth who were reunified with their parents were less likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college than those who remained in foster care through their 18\textsuperscript{th} birthday, who themselves lag far behind their peers.\footnote{Sarah A. Font, Lawrence M. Berger, Maria Cancian, and Jennifer L. Noyes, \textit{Permanency and the Educational and Economic Attainment of Former Foster Children in Early Adulthood}, American Sociological Review 2018, Vol. 83(4) 716–743.} A 2019 study found that youth who had experienced foster care and were homeless were as likely to have exited foster care at younger ages as they were to have emancipated from care.\footnote{Dworsky, A., Gitlow, E., Horwitz, B., & Samuels, G.M. (2019). \textit{Missed opportunities: Pathways from foster care to youth homelessness in America}. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.}

Many existing programs for foster youth including federal and state financial aid programs, in recognition of this reality, allow participation by youth who experienced foster care on or after their 13\textsuperscript{th} birthday.

7. Will changing the age requirement make it easier for students to verify status?

Yes. In 2017 the legislature passed SB 12, which created an automated verification process for students to verify their foster care status for the purposes of gaining independent status on the FAFSA (independent status allows a student to forgo providing parental income information when applying for financial aid). This is accomplished through a data match between the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC). The Webgrants system operated by CSAC now provides a screen that verifies when a student has been successfully matched. This allows the financial aid office to verify a student’s status without students being required to bring in a hard copy verification of their status as a foster youth to the financial aid office.

Because the federal government uses the standard of in foster care after age 13, this same verification cannot currently be used to verify eligibility for NextUp or priority registration, which use the standard of in foster care after 16. If program eligibility is made consistent with financial
aid qualifications, students will no longer have to bring paper verification for any benefit, removing a major barrier to participation.

8. **How many additional students would likely be served by the program if the age eligibility is changed?**

Based on data from the UC Berkeley Child Welfare Data Indicators Program the number of youth who exit foster care between the ages of 13 and 16 is approximately 42% of the total number of youth who exit foster care between 16 and 21. Based on the current program services numbers, it is estimated that between 900 and 1100 additional students would be served by the program.

9. **What is the current income eligibility threshold?**

Students must meet one of the following based on “prior-prior” year's income.
- Below 150% of the federal poverty level (150% calculates to $18,735 for one person)
- Be receiving TANF, SSI or General Assistance
- Financially eligible for federal and/or state needed-based financial aid with an expected family contribution (EFC) of zero. The calculation of EFC considers a variety of factors, but in the simplest scenario, for a single student with no dependents, their after tax adjusted income would need to be below $10,360.

10. **Why does the bill propose to make income requirements more flexible?**

Unlike with all other forms of financial aid, there is no allowance for exceptions based on “professional judgment” such as significant loss of income or a student who may have less financial need but has a significant need for services to be successful.

Students who worked full-time prior to returning to school are sometimes disqualified based on income despite having substantial current financial need. While the number who fall into this category is small, these non-traditional students are often in great need of support and cannot maintain their full-time employment while in college. There is currently no flexibility to account for this type of change in circumstances when evaluating eligibility.

11. **Why does the bill propose to allow programs to spend funds to support students prior to the first day of class?**

An interpretation of existing statute by the CCCCO precludes NextUp programs from offering direct support to enrolled students prior to the first day of class. In order to persist in college, students need stable housing in place, books purchased, and transportation secured prior to the start of class. Without the ability to assist students to purchase books and cover transportation costs before the first day of class, students are less likely to be prepared at the beginning of the term and may even be unable to make it to school for the first day of class, putting them at an even greater risk of academic failure. Many students also struggle to locate or maintain housing during the crucial transition during the summer prior to their first fall term. Programs need to have the ability to assist
students with stable housing prior to the start of class if they are to be able to focus on academics during the term.

12. What types of other administrative barriers are meant to be alleviated by SB 958?

Some campuses have interpreted existing law in a way that has led to the implementation of barriers to entry into the program such as requiring students to submit multiple applications or placing limits on when students are eligible to enter the program. Systems for entry into the program need to be as straightforward and barrier-free as possible given that foster youth have often been traumatized by the systems designed to help them and are therefore more likely to be discouraged by bureaucratic barriers and forgo accessing services.

These students are also more likely than other students, including other low-income, first generation or academically disadvantaged students to experience a crisis that jeopardizes their ability to stay enrolled in college such as homelessness or a mental health crisis. These students need to have access support as quickly and expeditiously as possible. Clarification of the law will support more streamlined access for potential program participants and ensure that students get the help that the need, when they need it.

13. What special challenges does a college student without a family face?

The challenges facing a young person attending college without a family are considerable:

- **Nowhere to live:** In 2016, living with a parent is the most common young adult living arrangement, with 32% of the 18 to 34-year-olds living with a parent.³ A 2019 analysis by the Student Aid Commission found that a full 56% of community college students in California lived with their parents.⁴ These numbers speak to the important role that families play in the housing stability of their adult children, in particular those attending college.

- **No one to help pay for college:** In 2016, parental savings and borrowing paid for 38 percent of the cost of college in the United States.¹⁴ This is the greatest single source of funding used by students to pay for college, and exceeds all other sources, including grants, scholarships, student income and student savings. This holds for low-income students and students attending 2-year colleges.

14. Are there other challenges that foster youth face when entering college?

The challenges faced by foster youth as they attempt to enroll in and matriculate through college have been well-documented. Foster youth enter college at a disadvantage from their

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⁴ California Student Aid Commission, *Student Expenses and Resources Survey Spotlight: Housing* (2019).
experiences as children. Foster youth are more likely to be chronically absent during high school, are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled, and attend on average twice as many schools between the ninth and twelfth grades than their peers. Foster youth also experience the long-term impacts of trauma that is experienced both in the home and sometimes through the foster care system itself. Over one in five youth in foster care has been diagnosed with a disability, almost three times the rate of the general population.

Foster youth who apply to attend community college are also less likely to successfully enroll than other students. Once enrolled in college, foster youth typically earn just two thirds of the credits as their peers during their first year, complete courses at substantially lower rates and are less likely to remain enrolled.

15. Is there evidence that programs like NextUp impact college outcomes?

Two recent studies point to the positive impact that campus support programs targeted to foster youth have on academic outcomes. A 2019 study of California’s Community College students with experience in foster care found that students who received student support grants from programs such as NextUp had a GPA that was 0.20 points higher than other foster youth and that these students completed an additional three units during their first year.

Research conducted by the University of Chicago’s Chapin Hall as part of the CalYouth study found that foster youth participating in a foster youth campus support program were over twice as likely to persist than those who did not, after controlling for a wide range of factors.

16. How much would the expansion of eligibility cost?

The proposed age eligibility change would cost an estimated $7.25 million, however, there is expected to be a savings of $3.25 million annually within the current $20 million allocation as a result of lower than anticipated enrollment numbers. This change would thus require an additional $4 million annual investment from the State budget. Other changes proposed in SB 958 are not expected to incur any costs.

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7 Pipeline to Success (2019).
9 Pipeline to Success (2019).