BACKGROUND
Access to higher education, whether a vocational certificate, associate degree, bachelor’s degree or beyond, is critical to help low-income youth move out of poverty. For low-income students whose academic prospects are already precarious, ongoing access to financial aid is essential to their ability to remain enrolled. Yet every year, thousands of these students in California’s colleges and universities lose access to financial aid because they fall below certain academic standards known as Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP).

SAP must be maintained in order to continue receiving federal student aid in order to keep moving toward successfully completing your degree or certificate in a time period that’s acceptable to your school.

A school’s policy will tell a student:
- the grade-point average they need to maintain
- how quickly they need to be moving toward graduation
- whether they are allowed to appeal their school’s decision that they haven’t made satisfactory academic progress (reasons for appeal usually include the death of a member of their family, their illness or injury, or other special circumstances
- how they can regain eligibility for federal student aid.

PROBLEM
Most colleges do offer the opportunity to appeal the loss of financial aid due to SAP, but appeals processes vary tremendously by campus.

Colleges have significant latitude under federal regulations to define the criteria for a successful appeal, but many do not take advantage of this flexibility. When a student experiences homelessness, the instability of this experience frequently causes grades to drop, however homelessness is not universally defined by colleges as a special circumstance that warrants a student being given the opportunity to maintain financial aid in order to remain enrolled and regain academic standing.

Nineteen percent of students at community colleges and eleven percent of California State University students experience homelessness, and African American students, Native American students, gay/lesbian students, and foster youth are disproportionately impacted by the homelessness crisis. Currently, for many students who experience homelessness, the loss of financial aid means the end of their academic career. Continued access to financial aid is a vital tool to allow these students to remain enrolled and get back on track academically.

SOLUTION
Assembly Bill 2416 will require colleges to consider homelessness as an extenuating circumstance when evaluating appeals for the loss of financial aid. AB 2416 will make it easier for college students who have experienced homelessness to remain enrolled and have access to higher education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Gabriela Castillo
Legislative Aide
(916) 319-2045
Gabriela.Castillo@asm.ca.gov