



SENATOR JIM BEALL

SB 860 Improving FAFSA Completion for Foster Youth

Coauthors: Senators Bates, Dodd, Durazo, Galgiani, Glazer, Hill, Jones, Pan, Wieckowski, Wiener, and Wilk; Assemblymembers Boerner Horvath, Cooley, Fong, Gipson, Gloria, Lackey, Rodriguez, Rubio, Smith, Stone, Voepel, and Waldron

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.

There is heighten need to care for foster youth in times of crises. COVID-19 poses a special risk to high school seniors with experience in foster care hoping to enroll in college in California. Studies after Hurricane Katrina showed that when schools and colleges shut down their campuses, often for several months, the most disadvantaged youth were the ones most likely to be permanently knocked off track. For these students, a crisis such as COVID-19 represents not a temporary blip in their educational trajectory, but rather a permanent departure from school and consequently very different career and life outcomes.

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.

For the past two years, John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) has partnered with the California Department of Education (CDE) to coordinate a statewide effort to increase the rate of FAFSA completion for foster youth. This was a voluntary effort in which county FYCSPs coordinated work across various partners, including school districts, child welfare agencies, and local colleges. This pilot increased FAFSA completion rates from 45% to 57% among high school seniors in just two years, leveraging \$2 million in financial aid.

If this work is not codified into law this year, it is likely that the progress that we have seen as a state will be reversed and the rates of financial aid access will drop at a time when these resources will be needed the most. As students in foster care become increasingly disconnected from high schools as a result of the crisis, youth who are in the care and custody of the State of California need now, more than ever, the steady hand of experts who can fill the gap left by the absence of parental involvement.

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)
AdvancED Consulting
Alameda County Court Appointed Special Advocates
Alliance for Children's Rights
Beyond Emancipation
Bill Wilson Center
California Alliance of Child and Family
California Faculty Association
California Federation of Teachers
California School Boards Association
California Student Aid Commission
California Teachers Association
California Youth Connection
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County
Children's Law Center of California
County of Los Angeles
County Welfare Directors Association of California
Creative Alternatives
CSU Monterey Bay's College Support Programs
East Bay Children's Law Offices
Education Trust-West
Excite Credit Union
First Place for Youth
First Start
Foster Care Counts
Marketing A La Carte
Modesto Junior College
Moreno Valley College
National Association of Social Workers
Norco College
One Day, Inc.
Reedley College
Rio Hondo College
Riverside Community College District
Santa Rosa Junior College
Silicon Valley Leadership Group
Skyline College Guardian Scholars Program
Star Vista
Swipe Out Hunger

Tipping Point
Foster Youth Resilience in Education, UC Irvine
UNITE-LA
Unity Care
VOICES
Walden Family Services
Wesley House
Youth Law Center

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Estevan Ginsburg
Office of Senator Jim Beall
(916) 651-4015
estevan.ginsburg@sen.ca.gov

