

PRESS RELEASE

Governor Signs Law to Improve Foster Youth Access to College Aid

SACRAMENTO, CA, Sept. 29, 2020 -- Governor Gavin Newsom signed new legislation late Monday to increase participation in college by foster youth by requiring state-funded agencies to assist foster youth in completing their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). A pilot project by John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) showed that this type of assistance raised foster youth FAFSA completion rates from 45% in 2017 to 64% in 2020.

“For too long, far too many foster youth have been denied their dream of a college education because they were unable to obtain the financial aid available to them,” said Amy Lemley, executive director of JBAY, which sponsored the bill. “By following the model of JBAY’s FAFSA Challenge program, this new law will help foster youth access tens of millions of dollars of additional aid.”

While 85 percent of foster youth say they aspire to go to college, just eight percent achieve a bachelor’s degree by age 26 compared with 46 percent of the general population, according to [studies](#). Only 46 percent of foster youth entering community college receive the Pell Grant and just 12 percent receive the CalGrant, despite the vast majority meeting the income eligibility criteria for this financial aid. The primary reason for this gap is that these youth are not successfully completing the complex and often daunting FAFSA process.

“My dream is to get a psychology degree and become a counselor,” said Toby Herrera, who graduated from Palmdale High School in LA County this summer. When a foster care liaison in Toby’s school district helped him with his FAFSA, he gained access to many additional resources, such as the Chaffee grant that provides up to \$5,000 per year. “Discovering all the resources available to foster youth through FAFSA has brought my dream closer to reality for me.”

The bill signed by Governor Newsom, *SB 860: Improving FAFSA Completion for Foster Youth*, requires California’s Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCPs) to coordinate FAFSA completion efforts for graduating high school seniors. FAFSA completion rates will also be monitored and reported bi-annually.

For three years, 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. The pilot program increased foster youth FAFSA completion rates from 45% in 2017 to 64.45% in 2020, which is now above the 56% rate for all graduating seniors in California.

SB 860: Improving FAFSA Completion for Foster Youth, authored by Senator Jim Beall and sponsored by JBAY, passed both houses unanimously. It will go into effect on January 1, 2021.