
March 11, 2020

The Honorable Connie Leyva
California State Senate
State Capitol Building, Room 4061
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT SB 958 (LEYVA) — COMMUNITY COLLEGES: SUPPORT SERVICES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

Dear Senator Leyva,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA) representing the over 5,000 pediatrician members of California AAP Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 statewide, strongly supports your bill Senate Bill 958 to facilitate greater access to higher education for current and former foster youth by strengthening an existing program for foster youth attending California's community colleges.

Children and youth typically enter foster care due to serious abuse and neglect. This trauma is often compounded by the instability they experience while in foster care, through placement and school changes. Together, these lead to poor educational outcomes, most notably low rates of college completion: just eight percent obtain a degree by age 26 as compared to 46 percent of the same-age non-foster youth population.

In 2014, this serious educational disparity led the California State Legislature to pass SB 1023 (Liu), which established a special program for foster youth enrolled in community college, known as NextUp. NextUp provides a comprehensive array of services to promote college retention and degree attainment. Students must have been in foster care after the age of 16, be under age 26, and be enrolled in a minimum of nine units to participate. While the NextUp program has been very effective, several barriers to access have been identified that create challenges for foster youth attempting to pursue a postsecondary credential.

This bill will make common sense changes to address these barriers, including modifying eligibility so that students who were in foster care after age 13 may participate, creating flexibility around income requirements for students transitioning from full-time employment to school, specifying that existing funds can be used to provide support to enrolled students as they are matriculating, and clarifying that programs should create streamlined systems for application and entry. Eligibility criteria for priority registration will also be aligned to match that of NextUp and foster youth financial aid criteria. These provisions will expand foster youths' access to higher education by making crucial support services more accessible.

Pediatricians across the state thank you for your leadership in authoring SB 958 to facilitate greater access to higher education for current and former foster youth by strengthening an existing program for foster youth attending California's community colleges.

Sincerely,



Melissa J. Ruiz MD FAAP
Member, Governing Board
American Academy of Pediatrics, California