

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER AND JANICE HAHN

OCTOBER 2, 2018

SUPPORTING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR FOSTER AND PROBATION YOUTH

Los Angeles County, home to one of the largest child welfare systems in the nation, serves more than 5,000 foster youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one within the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation Department. As foster youth age out of care, they struggle to access the education and employment training needed to maintain economic self-sufficiency and promote their holistic well-being.

Nationally 65 percent of all jobs will require a post-secondary education by 2020. However, current and former foster youth in Los Angeles County fall well behind other groups in completing a post-secondary education. A 2011 study funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation found that while nearly half of Los Angeles County foster youth enroll in college, only 2 percent succeed in completing an associate degree and just 2 percent achieve transfer to a four-year university.

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The Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council (ECC), created by the Board of Supervisors, is charged with raising the educational achievement of foster and probation youth throughout Los Angeles County. Through its members, which include county department officials, judicial officers, school board officials, school administrators and, other key stakeholders, the ECC provides a leadership framework in reforming and improving the academic success of our most vulnerable youth.

Evidence shows that receiving financial aid is a strong predictor of college success - positively impacting academic performance, transfer rates, and graduation rates - yet our foster youth have extremely low financial aid attainment rates despite their clear financial need.

Many initiatives have been launched to address this issue. Earlier this year, the Board of Supervisors supported Senate Bill 12 (Beall) that aims to increase the rate of financial aid awards, provide assistance with completing necessary forms and documents, and improve access to on-campus support. Under SB 12, which was signed into law, social workers and probation officers will need to identify an individual to support youth age 16 and older with their college and financial aid applications.

In addition, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) committed to lead the County's efforts to track foster youth's financial aid application rates as part of the statewide California Foster Youth FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Challenge, a campaign initiated by John Burton Advocates for Youth. LACOE's Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP) partnered with John Burton Advocates for Youth and the California Student Aid Commission to develop a new mechanism to track the financial aid application rates of foster youth high school seniors across Los Angeles County. While previously unavailable, we now know that just 37 percent of foster youth high school seniors completed the FAFSA by the state deadline during the 2017-2018 school year compared to the County's overall application rate of 50 percent. With this new data mechanism in place, we have a unique opportunity as a County to develop strategies to raise this number.

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DCFS and Probation, have also taken important steps to promote post-secondary access for youth in their care through a variety of regional initiatives and programs. For example, DCFS Youth Development Services have been collaborating with LACOE and can be a key partner in data information sharing along with the Probation Youth Development Services division.

It is incumbent on the County to identify opportunities to better support foster youth in our care in order to ease their transition into higher education and set youth up for long-term educational, career, and life success. This is in line with previous efforts by this Board to address poor educational outcomes and support the self-sufficiency of foster youth.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE, that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors direct the Education Coordinating Council, through the Office of Child Protection to facilitate enhanced support for post-secondary educational attainment of foster youth by the Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Probation, Los Angeles County Office of Education and other stakeholders through:

- Participation in the *California Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge*;
- Implementation of SB 12 provisions;
- Engagement with foster youth advocates; and
- Additional recommendations provided before October 1, 2019 for opportunities to improve financial aid application rates among foster youth, taking into account current available data and outcomes for future academic year.

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WE, FURTHER MOVE, that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors proclaim the month of October “Foster Youth College Awareness Month” in the County of Los Angeles and:

- Direct the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department to distribute materials and resources on the topic, such as the free Financial Aid Guide for California Foster Youth and the Foster Youth Educational Planning Guide, to foster and probation youth, social workers, probation officers, caregivers, educators, judicial officers and legal representatives, service providers, and other key stakeholders who work with transitional age foster youth; and
- Urge residents, public officials, and County employees to take action to assist foster youth in Los Angeles County to attend college.

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