

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

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Affirmative Efforts to Foster the Educational Futures of Current and Former Los Angeles County Foster Youth

College changes lives. Higher education not only provides opportunities for intellectual enrichment needed for informed and innovative citizens, it also provides technical, professional, and networking skills and opportunities that improve life outcomes, particularly for marginalized populations. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, those with a bachelor's degree will earn double what the average individual without a degree will make in their lifetime. Due to higher incomes and intellectual and social stimulation, higher education improves health outcomes as well. Individuals with more education are less likely to suffer from heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, anxiety, addiction, and depression, and they are more likely to exercise and seek preventative health care.

However, there are growing barriers to accessing higher education. Tuition and fees have risen dramatically nationwide, including in California. In 1985, a California resident attending a University of California (UC) campus paid \$1,296 in annual tuition

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and fees, which, adjusted for inflation, equates to about \$3,700 today. For the 2023-2024 academic year, UC undergraduates must pay \$15,352 in tuition and fees. These soaring tuition costs, in addition to rising costs for housing across the State, student housing shortages, and an overall increase in the cost of living, tremendously impact college students. These financial burdens associated with college present significant barriers to college attendance, particularly for low-income and marginalized populations, and cause students to either incur large amounts of debt or forego pursuing higher education altogether. And these financial obstacles are more pronounced for foster youth, who often transition to adult life with limited financial resources and supports.

Beyond the immediate financial barriers that affect enrollment in college by foster youth, these youth experience further disadvantages in their pursuit of higher education, as many do not have the benefit of the educational and social resources and supports necessary to successfully enroll in and complete college. While 93% of foster youth say they want to attend college, a mere 4% will obtain a bachelor's degree by the age of 26, compared to 50% of the non-foster youth population. Lack of access to adequate educational counseling, intergenerational knowledge pertaining to higher education, and family support needed to navigate the college application, financial aid, and student loan processes, further hinder foster youth from attaining the goal of completing college. Higher education is a road to life-changing opportunities and economic security, but, for foster youth, it has been significantly obstructed by financial and structural barriers.

Fortunately, the State has taken action to support access to higher education by current and former foster youth. Senate Bill 307 (Ashby and McGuire), recently signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom, will expand the State's Middle Class Scholarship to

create The Fostering Futures Program. Beginning with the 2024-2025 academic year, The Fostering Futures Program will allow foster youth enrolled in an associate's degree, transfer pathway, or certificate program at a community college, or a four-year program at a CSU or UC, to have 100% of their unmet need covered, including their tuition, books, food, and lodging, after other aid is applied. This legislation is monumental for supporting the financial well-being of foster youth. Not only will it provide current and former foster youth who are attending college with a pathway to immediate financial assistance to greatly improve their economic and housing security, it will also encourage more foster youth to attend college in the future. With the financial barriers of tuition, housing, and education-associated costs lifted, foster youth yearning for a college education will no longer have to make the difficult financial decision to sacrifice their education due to its cost. This program will change the lives of the foster youth it benefits by providing the educational opportunities necessary for better paying jobs, better health, and better life outcomes.

It is necessary to ensure that The Fostering Futures Program reaches as many foster youth as possible. To that end, it is incumbent on the County to inform and actively encourage eligible foster youth to participate in The Fostering Futures Program. In addition to widely disseminating information about the program and promoting participation, since foster youth often face significant challenges, including lack of personal and family supports, we must also ensure that foster youth have assistance in navigating the various applications and requirements so that they are successful in utilizing the life-changing benefits that The Fostering Futures Program will confer.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Children and Family services, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of Education, to develop an outreach campaign to widely disseminate information about The Fostering Futures Program, including clear eligibility requirements and additional resources geared at assisting with the application process, to encourage current and former foster youth to apply.
2. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of Education, through the use of staff and/or other resources, such as educational counselors, advocates, foster youth district liaisons, mentors, peer counselors, or others with experience navigating educational application processes, to assist current foster youth with completion of the requisite steps and applications needed to qualify and apply for The Fostering Futures Program, including, but not limited to, The Fostering Futures Program application, a Free Application for Federal Student Aid application, a California Dream Act application, any other applications necessary to determine a student's financial eligibility, and applications for all other federal, state, or institutionally administered grants or fee waivers for which the student is eligible.
3. Direct the Los Angeles County Office of Education, through the use of staff and/or other resources, such as educational counselors, advocates, foster youth district liaisons, mentors, peer counselors, or others with experience navigating educational application processes, to assist former foster youth with completion of the requisite steps and applications needed to qualify and apply for The Fostering Futures Program, including, but not limited to, The Fostering Futures Program application; a Free Application for Federal Student Aid application; a California Dream Act

application; any other applications necessary to determine a student's financial eligibility; and applications for all other federal, state, or institutionally administered grants or fee waivers for which the student is eligible.

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