



July 13, 2020

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

RE: SUPPORT AB 2416 (GABRIEL) — FINANCIAL AID ACCESS FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Dear Senator Leyva,

AdvancED Consulting, LLC is pleased to support Assembly Bill 2416, which will make it easier for college students who have experienced homelessness to remain enrolled, by requiring that colleges consider homelessness as an extenuating circumstance when evaluating appeals for the loss of financial aid.

As the owner of nonprofit and operations consultancy AdvancED Consulting, LLC, I have supported nonprofit and education organizations and community leaders across California since 2011. I am also the Founding Operations Director of the California College Guidance Initiative, a virtual statewide organization that uses www.CaliforniaColleges.edu to support 15% of California's 6th-12th grade students in developing informed, thoughtful postsecondary plans in collaboration with schools, districts, postsecondary institutions, and community organizations. I have spent the last three years researching and writing content specific to supporting underserved populations like California's homeless youth in accessing the support they need to not just survive in this state, but to thrive. Today, I serve multiple nonprofits in supporting youth through effective college access and financial aid coaching programs, tools, and services. As a Commissioner for the Commission on the Status of Women serving Santa Clara County, I am especially attentive to the homeless youth in this county and the need to support them comprehensively and holistically. Ensuring their access to financial aid is a critical step in the right direction.

Access to higher education, whether a vocational certificate, associate degree, bachelor's degree or beyond, is critical to help low-income youth move out of poverty. For low-income students whose academic prospects are already precarious, ongoing access to financial aid is absolutely essential to their ability to remain enrolled, and yet, every year, over 600,000 students in California's colleges and universities lose access to financial aid because they fall below certain academic standards known as Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP).

COVID-19 has exacerbated both the likelihood that students will struggle with academic progress and the likelihood of experiencing homelessness.

In addition, students of color experience a greater likelihood of both losing financial aid due to SAP standards and becoming homeless during the crisis. Whereas 52% of white students experienced basic needs insecurity during the pandemic, those challenges affected 71% of African American students. Similarly, while 22% of white students do not make SAP, the number of African American students who fail to make SAP is 41%, almost double the rate of white students.

Most colleges offer the opportunity to appeal the loss of financial aid due to SAP, but appeals processes vary tremendously by campus. Colleges are given significant latitude under federal regulations to define the criteria for a successful appeal, but many do not take advantage of this flexibility. When a student experiences homelessness, the instability of this experience frequently causes grades to drop, however homelessness is not universally defined by colleges as a special circumstance that warrants a student being given the opportunity to maintain financial aid in order to remain enrolled and regain academic standing.

For many students who experience homelessness, the loss of financial aid means the end of their academic career. Continued access to financial aid, now more than ever, is a vital tool to allow these students to remain enrolled and get back on track academically.

We strongly support the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Curry', with a long, sweeping underline.

Meredith Curry
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