



July 7, 2020

The Honorable Member Patrick O'Donnell
California State Assembly
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0070

RE: SUPPORT SB 860 (BEALL) — IMPROVING FAFSA COMPLETION FOR FOSTER YOUTH

Dear Assembly Member O'Donnell,

AdvancED Consulting, LLC is pleased to support Senate Bill 860, which will clarify the role of Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCPs), housed within County Offices of Education to include coordination of efforts to support FAFSA completion among foster youth who are high school seniors. It will also add FAFSA completion rates to FYSCP's bi-annual reporting requirement.

As the owner of management and Salesforce 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 foster 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 foster youth in this county and the need to support them comprehensively and holistically. Ensuring their access to financial aid through completion of the FAFSA is a step in the right direction.

California has been a leader nationwide on improving access to higher education for current and former foster youth by making critical state improvements to expand pathways to a high school diploma and post-secondary education. However, foster youth continue to lag behind their peers, with foster youth at community colleges successfully completing courses at a rate 18% below non foster youth. Financial aid plays a major role in student success, with multiple studies showing that financial aid receipt positively impacts grade point average, transfer rates, and undergraduate degree attainment. Furthermore, research has identified low rates of financial aid receipt among foster youth as a significant factor in the low rate of college success.

The FAFSA is the first step towards obtaining both state and federal financial aid, however, many foster youth are left to navigate the daunting and complicated system without guidance or assistance, resulting in low completion rates. As a result, the FAFSA is completed on an ad hoc basis and too often crucial deadlines are missed, critical information for student verification is missing, and the FAFSA is not successfully submitted. **Just 49 percent of foster youth at community colleges receive a Pell grant in their first year and just 12 percent receive a CalGrant.** For the past two years, John Burton Advocates for Youth (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. **This pilot increased FAFSA completion rates from 45% to 64% among high school seniors in just three years, leveraging \$2 million in financial aid.**

SB 860 would improve FAFSA completion by foster youth and increase access to financial aid by:

- Clarifying that the role of FYCSPs to ensure that foster youth have access to programs that support their matriculation needs includes coordination of efforts to support FAFSA completion among high school seniors in foster care.
- Adding FAFSA completion rates to FYSCP bi-annual reporting requirements.

These provisions will expand foster youths' access to higher education by recognizing the unique barriers they face and ensuring financial aid is effectively offered to our highest need students.

We strongly support the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Curry', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Meredith Curry
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