

February 28, 2021

The Hon. Lisa Calderon
Chair, Assembly Human Services Committee
1020 N Street, Room 124
Sacramento, CA 95817

Re: SUPPORT AND CO- SPONSORSHIP OF AB 546 (MAIENSCHIEIN)

Dear Chair Calderon:

The Children's Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law, which for 30 years has worked to improve the well-being of children in California through regulatory, legislative, and judicial advocacy, and Dependency Legal Services, a multi-disciplinary, non-profit law firm providing legal representation to parents and children involved with California's Child Welfare System in nine California counties, respectfully requests your support for AB 546 (Maienschein).

Homelessness Is A Significant Problem Among Children Who Grew Up In The Foster Care System.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that more than 20,000 young people age out of foster care each year. While California was an early adopter of extended foster care which allows foster children to remain under the jurisdiction of the court until age 21 as long as they meet certain requirements, California's foster youth are still *en masse* struggling with housing insecurity. "Every year about 4,000 youth age out of care in California. According to Walden Family Services, 65% leave foster care at age 18 with no place to call home. In a representative sample of foster youth in California, over one-third of aged-out 19-year-olds experience homelessness and over 40% couch-surf.[] About 1,400 age out in Los Angeles and of those, at least 400 become instantly homeless upon aging out."¹

¹ <https://finallyfamilyhomes.org/the-problem/#:~:text=More%20than%2023%2C000%20children%20will,by%20the%20age%20of%2024> Forty-four

Twenty percent of the youths who are in extended foster care -- still under the jurisdiction of the court -- experienced homelessness.² In June 2020, 539 former foster youth were on the waiting list for the THP-Plus housing program.³ “It is estimated ... that at least 16 percent of youth on waiting list are experiencing homelessness.”⁴ “Nearly one in four youth experiences homelessness while in foster care prior to entering THP-NMD, and one in three youth experienced homelessness between leaving foster care and entering THP-Plus.”⁵ Similarly, “nine percent of youth who enrolled in THP-NMD and 15 percent of youth in THP-Plus entered the program directly from an emergency shelter, homelessness, or other unstable housing (street, car, couch-surfing, etc.) At exit, six percent of youth across both programs exited to emergency shelter, homelessness, or other unstable housing.”⁶ Homelessness rates are even higher for certain foster youth such as youth identifying as LGBTQ.⁷

Moreover, while pandemic relief measures have resulted in fewer non-minors are exiting foster care because temporary COVID-19 extensions allow youths to remain in care past age 21, once these extensions are lifted, the housing shortage will become more severe and will become more severe all at once. Indeed, “[t]he majority of [foster] youth who were working at the onset of the State of Emergency either lost their jobs or experienced a reduction in hours—79 percent in THP-NMD and 60 percent in THP-Plus.”⁸

Effects Of Homelessness Are Far-Reaching.

Homelessness can have far-reaching and long term effects. Homeless youth are more likely to develop substance abuse issues and are more likely to be victims of

percent of foster youth who leave the extended care program early report experiencing homelessness, underscoring the challenge for those youth who do not remain in care after 18 years of age. (Feng, H., Harty, J., Okpych, N., and Courtney, Mark (May 2020) *Memo from Cal Youth: Predictors of Homelessness at Age 21*. Chicago, Illinois: Chaplin Hall at the University of Chicago p. 4).

² Feng, H., Harty, J., Okpych, N., and Courtney, Mark (May 2020) *Memo from Cal Youth: Predictors of Homelessness at Age 21*. Chicago, Illinois: Chaplin Hall at the University of Chicago pg. 4.

³ Transitional Housing Program for Nonminor Dependents, covering ages 18-21. THP-Plus is similar. Both help participants emancipate successfully by providing a safe environment for youth, while learning skills that can make them self-sufficient. Participants may live alone, with departmental approval, or with roommates in apartments or single-family dwellings with an employee or an employee living on site. Support and supervision is provided by agency staff, county social workers and ILP coordinators. Supportive services include: educational guidance, employment counseling, and assistance reaching emancipation goals outlined in a participant’s Transitional Independent Living Plan, the emancipation readiness portion of a youths’ case plan.

⁴ Lee, Simone Tureck, “THP-NMD & THP-PLUS ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20” (2020) San Francisco: California: John Burton Advocates for Youth p.14.

⁵ Id. at p.3.

⁶ Id. at p.16.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lee, Simone Tureck, “THP-NMD & THP-PLUS ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20” (2020) San Francisco: California: John Burton Advocates for Youth p.26.

physical and sexual abuse. Homeless can also have devastating health effects, including increased rates of asthma, diabetes, Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDs.⁹

In the COVID crisis, the risk posed by homelessness to a youth's health has only increased. "Youth's risk of infection is increased by their tendency to have to frequently change where they are sleeping, to be intermittently unsheltered and to change with whom they are sheltering." Moreover, these youth tend to be medically venerable, which often puts them at increased risk for serious complications due to Covid-19.¹⁰

AB 546 (Maienschein)

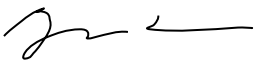
Against this backdrop of tragedy, and measured by our matchless moral obligation to the children who we have by force of law removed from the care of their parents to be raised in our care, this bill is exceedingly modest. The bill only requires the dependency judge be told what is already known by the county when a child is about to age out; namely, whether in fact the child has arranged for a stable place to live. The bill then relatedly requires a conversation about what can be done to arrange for such housing before a child we are raising is knowingly made homeless.

Please support AB 546 (Maienschein).

Sincerely,



Ed Howard
Senior Counsel, Children's Advocacy Institute



Julia Hanagan
Policy Director, Dependency Legal Services

cc Hon. Members of the Committee:

⁹ *Consequences of Homelessness*. California Coalition for Youth <https://calyouth.org/advocacy-policy/californias-homeless-youth>. Access 23 Feb. 2021.

¹⁰ Auerswald, Colette, (2020) *For the Good of Us All: Addressing the Needs of Our Unhoused Neighbors*, University of California, Berkley School of Public Health, Berkley California p.23-24); California Coalition for Youth 2021 Homelessness Youth Survey.