[Place on your letterhead]

[INSERT date]

The Honorable Carol Liu, Chair
Senate Committee on Education
California State Capitol
Room 2083
Sacramento, CA 95814

*Sent via FAX: 916-445-7799*

**SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 1023: Foster Youth Attending Community College**

Dear Senator Liu,

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 1023, which would improve the long-term academic success of current and former foster youth by establishing much needed support for this academically disadvantaged population on California’s community college campuses.

[insert a short paragraph about your organization]

As you are aware, youth who enter community college from foster care do so with a range of disadvantages. Academically, they are far behind their peers due to several factors, including frequent school changes while in the foster care system, high rates of physical and mental disability, and disproportionate attendance at our lowest performing schools.

Together, these factors result in educational delays. In the area of English Language Arts, just 29 percent of foster youth in grades 2 to 11 are proficient, a rate that is less than half the general student population. Results are equally poor for mathematics, with 37 percent of California foster youth testing proficient. These poor academic outcomes translate into high drop-out rates and low rates of high school graduation.

Not surprisingly, these academic disadvantages follow foster youth into higher education, with few foster youth entering community college and even fewer persisting past the first year of study. According to a 2013 study, youth in foster care were 47 percent less likely to enter community college than the general student population and 51 percent less likely to return after the first year.

A key reason why foster youth fail to succeed in community college is the lack of support on campus to meet their unique needs. SB 1023 would address this by authorizing community college districts to apply for funding to establish a supplemental component of the existing Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) program to provide support services to meet the unique needs of current and former foster youth. These services would include counseling and mental health services, career counseling, matriculation and transfer counseling, monitoring of academic progress, tutoring and mentoring, independent living skills, housing assistance, child care and transportation allowances, allowances for books and supplies, frequent in-person contact, and other related services. SB 1023 would require a biennial report describing efforts to serve students, including a review on a campus-by-campus basis of the enrollment, retention, transfer, and completion rates.

The use of campus support programs is an evidence-based approach that proves that foster youth *can* overcome their serious academic delays and be successful when they receive the necessary academic and social support. A 2012 report concluded that foster youth who participate in campus support programs are three times more likely to persist in college than foster youth nationwide. Additionally, California’s EOPS program has been rigorously evaluated and found to improve student outcomes.

Ultimately, low educational attainment is a factor in the poor adult outcomes among youth in foster care. Compared to their same-age counterparts, former foster youth at age 26 are four times more likely to have been incarcerated and 3.5 more likely to be living below the federal poverty level. College completion not only means better individual economic outcomes, but also increases in state tax revenues and decreases in costs spent on social welfare programs and incarceration. A recent study found that a $1 investment in California higher education yields a return of $4.50. In short, higher education is an opportunity for individuals to escape economic instability and poverty, which benefits all Californians. With SB 1023, foster youth attending community college will have this opportunity.

We thank you for your long-standing leadership in supporting the educational needs of foster youth and for authoring this important legislation.

Sincerely,

[INSERT Your Full Name]
[INSERT Your Title (if applicable)]
[INSERT Organization name]
[INSERT Organization address]