



SENATOR JIM BEALL

SB 912 Emergency Foster Care Stability Act

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ISSUE

COVID-19 has created an unprecedented crisis around the world. California's shelter in place order has disrupted daily life, halted the economy, and negatively impacted critical services provided by the state. As many industries struggle to cope with the new normal, foster youth are hit especially hard. Many foster youth are in need of emergency policy changes in order to maintain stable placements, safe housing, and their academic goals.

Foster youth who turn 18 during the pandemic are losing the ability to enter extended foster care due to the inability of courts to hold hearings. AB 12 (Beall, 2010) gave foster youth turning 18 the opportunity to receive continued support until age 21. This continued support gives foster youth the security and help to go to college, to find a job, and to create a career.

Additionally, Non-Minor Dependents, foster youth ages 18 to 21 in extended foster care, are ageing out of support in the middle of the current crisis. This leaves them at risk of economic vulnerability and homelessness with no support to navigate the current state of emergency.

BACKGROUND

Under normal circumstances, national estimates suggest that between 24-50% of Foster Youth become homeless within 18 months after turning 18. In California, only 58% of Foster Youth graduate from high school. The current pandemic's impact on health services and the economy will only create more instability for these vulnerable youths. It is essential that the State act quickly to ensure they are not overlooked in this crisis.

During the stay at home order and state of emergency, many courts have prioritized the most essential hearings and proceedings. As a result, foster youth disposition hearings are being delayed. The disposition hearing is required for extended foster care and must take place

before they turn 18 or the foster youth may become ineligible for a continuation of services.

In addition, current non-minor dependents are losing services on their 21st birthday and are forced into an active public health crisis, recession, and state of emergency without support. This pandemic has limited the availability of housing, jobs, and essential services, further jeopardizing the safety of foster youth ageing out of extended foster care. The interruption of services and placements is dangerous to the youth and may result in the spread of COVID-19.

Typically, a social worker meets with a Foster Youth or Non-Minor Dependent six months and then ninety days prior to their transition out of care to establish a transition plan. This plan includes employment options, housing options, and roadmap for educational attainment. The current shelter in place order and social distancing guidelines have greatly restricted the ability of social workers to visit with youth and develop meaningful plans. The lack of capable technology has left many youth without a feasible plan for aging out into uncertain times, compounding the threats to their stability.

Even with a completed transition plan, foster youth have found themselves unable to enact it due to the crisis. Essential opportunities for housing and employment are no longer available, as apartments are not accepting new leases, and companies have hiring freezes. Foster Youth and Non-Minor Dependents simply need more time to recraft and fulfill a transition plan at the conclusion of the state of emergency, to ensure a successful transition into the next stage of their life.

THIS BILL

SB 912 will respond to the immediate needs of foster youth in response to COVID-19 and also put in place emergency protocols for foster youth and non-minor dependents during future declared states of emergencies. Specifically, it will:

- Place foster youth who turn 18 during a State of Emergency into the non-minor dependency system, unless they opt out;
- Stabilize non-minor dependents aging out on their 21st birthday and continue to provide services until at least six months after the state of emergency concludes;
- Close loopholes in the current system which prevent youth from entering extended foster care.

SUPPORT

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