March 22, 2019

Assemblymember Jose Medina
Chair, Assembly Higher Education Committee
1020 N Street, Room 173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for Assembly Bill 806 (Bloom)

Dear Assemblymember Medina,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) Commission, we write in support of Assembly Bill 806 (Bloom), which extends priority enrollment to college students experiencing homelessness and reduces barriers to academic success.

LAHSA is a joint powers authority of the City and County of Los Angeles and serves as the lead agency in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (LA CoC). LAHSA is responsible for funding a significant portion of the interim housing, permanent housing, and supportive services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County.

Attaining a college degree opens the door to economic mobility and self-sufficiency but is significantly harder to reach for the thousands of California students who face housing insecurity and homelessness. AB 806 recognizes that experiences with homelessness, past and present, can profoundly challenge a student’s ability to prioritize their academic studies, stay in the classroom, and complete their degree. By extending priority course enrollment to those who become homeless during their course of study and making this priority permanent, this bill provides a measure of relief for students who face distinct and often persistent challenges to college success.

Research finds that high numbers of students in California face severe housing insecurity and homelessness across state’s colleges and universities. Eleven percent (11%) of students enrolled in the California State University System (CSU), home to the nation’s most ethnically and economically diverse student body, reported an experience with homelessness or housing insecurity in the past year.¹ Across the state’s community college system, the rate is nearly double; 19 percent (19%) of students lack a stable, safe living situation, of which six percent (6%) self-identified as homeless.² While housing insecurity impacts students across demographics, we see disproportionately higher rates of homelessness among black and African American students, as well as students who identify as LGTQT.³

If passed, AB 806 builds on the promising support framework established under the Success for Homeless Youth in Higher Education Act (2016), which included the introduction of homeless student liaisons and the extension of select services to homeless youth. With rising numbers of college students on the edge of homelessness, it is crucial that campuses have support systems in place to minimize the destabilizing effect homelessness can have on a student’s academic success.

We are encouraged by state efforts to reduce the barriers to higher education for young people, and stand committed to ensuring that homelessness does not stand in the way of college success for California’s youth.

Sincerely,

Kelli Bernard
Chair, LAHSA Commission

Peter Lynn
Executive Director