June 20, 2019

Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for Senate Bill 150 (Beall)

Dear Chair Gonzalez,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), I write in strong support of Senate Bill 150 (Beall), which seeks to enhance the Chafee Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) program by improving the grant distribution process and adjusting program requirements to reflect the distinct barriers facing California’s foster youth.

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.

SB 150 holds the potential for significant impact within Los Angeles County. In Fall 2018, there were over 3,800 youth with experiences in foster care who were enrolled in the County’s 21 community colleges alone.1 This number can be expected to increase; data indicates that college enrollment amongst foster youth has been growing significantly since the implementation of extended foster care in California, with a statewide increase from 11,000 youth in 2012 to over 16,000 in 2017.

While a college degree opens the door to economic mobility and self-sufficiency, the pathway to academic success is significantly more challenging for foster youth. Though college enrollment among foster youth has increased in recent years, they remain 50% less likely than their peers to stay enrolled in college. Additionally, statewide data finds that foster youth, once enrolled, are at higher risk of housing instability and homelessness. Across California’s community college system, nearly one in five students lack a safe, stable place to sleep at night.2 These rates more than double for students who have been in foster care, with 43% reporting severe housing insecurity, including homelessness.3 A loss of housing can profoundly challenge their ability to meet academic requirements and complete their degree, leaving students vulnerable to continued economic instability.

A known contributor to college success is access to financial aid. Each year, the Chafee ETV program awards more than 3,500 students in California with grants to cover housing, childcare, transportation, and other expenses that support academic well-being. Yet, the

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1 California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office – Management Information Systems Data Mart
current practice of administering these grants falls short of supporting these students when they often need it the most. By adopting a process of “over-rewarding” these funds, this bill helps ensure that more students have timely access to financial assistance, providing them with a measure of cost relief and stability early in the year. This is particularly critical as we work to address housing insecurity among our student population. Over-rewarding allows more students to cover move-in costs and stabilize their living situations, laying a more secure foundation as they head into the school year.

This bill also recognizes that few circumstances are as destabilizing as homelessness. Youth advocates report that 20 to 50% of Chafee ETV grant recipients lose their aid after failing to meet the satisfactory academic performance requirement. This is especially concerning given that a loss of aid only deepens academic challenges, including a lack of college completion, for students in a housing crisis. SB 150 would introduce clearer guidance around eligibility guidelines and an appeals process that accounts for extenuating circumstances, including homelessness, when a student falls short of meeting requirements. In doing so, SB 150 replaces punitive measures with targeted academic support and services, providing stability in aid and increasing a student’s chances of academic success.

With large numbers of college students on the edge of homelessness, we must ensure that students have timely access to available aid and continue to recognize the devastating impact housing insecurity can have on student persistence and success. LAHSA is encouraged by state efforts to address youth homelessness, and stands committed to ensuring that housing insecurity and homelessness do not stand in the way of college success for California’s youth.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Peter Lynn
Executive Director