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ASSEMBLYMEMBER, SEVENTY-SEVENTH DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 546

Preventing Foster Youth Homelessness

As Introduced 2/10/2021

Summary

AB 546 seeks to prevent foster youth exiting the system from becoming homeless by requiring county welfare agencies to report information to the dependency court on whether the foster youth has stable housing and what additional referrals will be provided to prevent the youth from becoming homeless.

Background

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. The National Center for Housing and Child Welfare estimates that approximately 25 percent of these young people experience homelessness within four years of leaving foster care and an even higher share are precariously housed in unstable housing situations (such as cars, shelters, “couch surfing”, etc).

To the extent we have solid California data, they affirm the crisis of homelessness among

the children who are raised in our care. While California was an early adopter of extended foster care, which allows certain foster children to remain under the jurisdiction of the court until age 21, California’s foster youth are still 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”.

Twenty percent of the youths who are in extended foster care -- still under the jurisdiction of the court -- experienced homelessness. In June 2020, 539 former foster youth were on the waiting list for the THP-Plus housing program. It is estimated that at least 16 percent of youth on waiting list are experiencing homelessness. 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. 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. At exit, six percent of youth across both programs exited to emergency shelter, homelessness, or other unstable housing. Homelessness rates are even higher for certain foster youth such as youth identifying as LGBTQ.

Moreover, while pandemic relief measures have resulted in fewer non-minors exiting foster care, once these measures are lifted, the housing shortage will become more severe and the impacts will be felt all at once. The 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.

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 physical and sexual abuse. Homeless can also have devastating health effects, including increased rates of asthma, diabetes, Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDs. The COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated the risks posed to a homeless youth's health.

Currently, Welfare and Institutions Code Section 391 requires the county welfare agencies to report to the court what referrals have been made by the social worker to the youth to help secure permanent housing for

the non-minor prior to terminating dependency. However, the Code fails to require the agency actually to report to the judge whether, in fact, such efforts have secured stable housing. Consequently, judges may terminate dependency, possibly rendering a youth immediately homeless, without even being aware they are doing so.

This Bill

This bill requires county welfare agencies to include additional information in the report presented to the court prior to a foster youth being require to live on their own:

- A statement from on whether the youth has or does not have stable housing post-foster care.
- What additional referrals will be provided to the youth to prevent homelessness if the youth does not have stable housing arranged.

Support

Children's Advocacy Institute
Dependency Legal Services

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