

[Date]

The Honorable Assemblymember or Senator [Member's Name]:
California State
State Capitol, Room
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for AB 2264 (de León)

Dear [Member's Name]:

[The name of your organization] requests your support of AB 2264, an important and common sense bill that will ensure that we do not unintentionally lock homeless youth into a cycle of homelessness.

Californians younger than 25 are only homeless because of what adults do to them. They are homeless because they are either (i) former foster youth, uniformly abused and neglected, who we by state policy frequently kick out to the streets to fend for themselves on or around their 18th birthdays; (ii) runaways who have fled home to remove themselves from a dangerous or abusive home life; or (iii) youth who have been forcibly evicted from their homes by their parents.

Sometimes, these homeless youth are ticketed for offenses that are the consequence of their involuntary homelessness. Such offenses include vagrancy, loitering, and the like. To reiterate: ticketing homeless youth cannot dissuade them from being homeless. It is like ticketing someone for being tall. They do not choose to be homeless – living dangerously on the streets. The danger and precariousness of their every nighttime is a far greater disincentive to engage in the offending conduct than a ticket.

Even so, they are given tickets not because of their own choices but because of the policies or conduct of adults. This is bad enough. Worse, as documented by the California Research Bureau¹, is that when these young people fail to show up for their hearings and pay the fine -- how can they? – sometimes the tickets will be turned over to collections.

And, collections in turn, will sometimes garnish their wages or bank accounts; things that make it far harder for homeless youth to end their homelessness by the sweat of their own brow.

Indeed, according to the Bureau's study, 43% of homeless youth surveyed were trying to earn money through employment, temporary work, or odd jobs. The number of youth who reported obtaining money through employment exceeded the number of youth obtaining money through public assistance.²

As the Research Bureau documents:

“This was true for the young people in our study, who reported that failure to pay led to problems including having their wages garnished[.]”³

This, quite simply, is grotesque; a terrible reflection of our values. It also is self-defeating. The tickets are issued to dissuade the offense. But, where involuntarily homeless youth are concerned, the collections strategies make it *even more likely that the offense will be repeated*.

¹ *Voices From The Street*, Bernstein, N., Foster, L. California Research Bureau, (2008)
<http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/08/08-004.pdf>

² *Id.*, at p. 47

³ *Id.*, at p. 57

This bill does not prohibit tickets from issuing. The offense is still the offense. Rather, the bill narrowly targets simply garnishment, a practice that is illogically applied to this situation because it exacerbates the social ills the tickets are intended to dissuade.

For these reasons, we ask for your support for this common sense, compassionate measure to help California's homeless youth end their own homelessness by their own initiative.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

cc: Assemblymember Kevin de León
Ed Howard, Children's Advocacy Institute