[DATE]

Assemblymember O’Donnell

Chair, Assembly Education Committee

State Capitol, Room 4166

Sacramento, CA 95814

***RE: Support for AB 379 (Gordon): Foster Youth: Educational Rights***

Dear Assemblymember O’Donnell:

The [Name of Organization] is pleased to support Assembly Bill 379, a bill that will ensure that children in foster care receive the educational protections they are entitled to and that are vital to their ability to succeed in school. This bill would also benefit homeless children who possess many of the same educational rights as foster youth.

[Insert paragraph regarding your organization, if desired.]

Education outcomes for children and youth in foster care are abysmal. The *Invisible Achievement Gap*, released last year, found that California’s foster youth were significantly more likely to change schools than other at-risk students, were significantly more likely to be enrolled in the lowest-performing schools than other at-risk students, were significantly more likely to drop out than any other at-risk student group and tested below basic and far below basic in English Language Arts and Math at twice the rate of students statewide.[[1]](#footnote-1) A new study released in February 2015 confirms these results. This Chapin Hall survey of California’s foster youth found that nine out of ten youth reported that they had to change schools due to a family move or foster care placement change and about one-third changed schools seven or more times. Approximately one-third of the youth surveyed also reported that they were out of school for one month or longer because of a foster care placement change.[[2]](#footnote-2) These poor outcomes are linked to foster youth’s school mobility, extended absences, experiences of trauma and other factors unique to this population.

Recognizing the unique challenges of this vulnerable population, the California Legislature has led the nation by passing numerous bills over the past decade to provide foster youth with needed educational protections and services. As a result of these reforms, foster youth have the right to remain in their school of origin, immediate enrollment, enrollment in their local comprehensive school, partial credits, and to graduate with state minimum requirements rather than district requirements when a transfer occurred following the second year of high school and the student cannot reasonably complete district requirements.

Although foster youth have possessed many of these rights for over ten years, the reality is that the education rights of foster youth are routinely ignored. One reason for this is the lack of an appropriate enforcement mechanism. This problem can be remedied by including foster youth education rights in the California Department of Education’s existing Uniform Complaint Procedure (UCP). Under the UCP complaints are first made to the local school district. Appeal to the California Department of Education is available if the complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the school district. Making the Uniform Complaint Procedure available to foster youth, will highlight their educational needs and rights and bring about increased compliance with the laws designed to help foster youth succeed in school.

By including foster youth education rights in the Uniform Complaint Procedure the Legislature will provide a way to enforce these important—and too long ignored—rights for the small but highly vulnerable population of school-age foster children. We urge your support of AB 379.

Sincerely,

[Name]   
[Title]

[Organization]

cc: Assemblymember Gordon

1. Barrat, V. X., & Berliner, B. (2013). *The Invisible Achievement Gap, Part 1: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in California’s Public Schools.* San Francisco: WestEd. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Okpych, N.J., Courtney, M.E.& Pajarita, C. (2015). *Youth and Caseworker Perspectives on Older Adolescents in California Foster Care: Youths’ Education Status and Services.* Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)