

[Date]

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

RE: Support for SB 945 (Liu)

Dear [Member's Name]:

[The name of your organization] requests your support of SB 945, an important and common sense bill to ensure that foster children are not denied services they are already entitled to because of jurisdictional confusion between the juvenile justice system and the county dependency system.

SB 945, as currently drafted, would help ensure that every former foster youth receives Independent Living Program (ILP) services and all other state entitlements for emancipating foster youth. The bill provides that when a former foster youth is discharged either from the dependency court or from the juvenile delinquency court, all such "former" foster youth are given proof of their entitlement to access to ILP and other available transitional living services.

Juveniles arrested on a criminal charge generally have parents and keep those parents even while in juvenile detention.

When foster youth "age out" of the foster care system at the age of 18 they are especially in need of assistance, almost by definition. A variety of assistance and counseling programs are already by law made available to all former foster youth. These programs provide modest assistance with housing, college planning and financing, and job and financial counseling. Eligibility for these programs is based on the youth's status as a foster youth and is not supposed to be altered by their stint in the juvenile justice system.

Although California permits counties to operate under a "dual jurisdiction" system for young people who may, at different times, be placed in both dependency and ward of the court status, only 8 counties have adopted such a "dual jurisdiction" system. In all of the other counties, as a practical matter, foster youth who are removed to delinquency court status frequently do not return to their former dependency status. This is often because dependency housing placement is unavailable, even when the youth has satisfied court-ordered juvenile detention or treatment. So, for those youth not in "dual jurisdiction" counties, their status is as a practical matter "siloeed."

Because foster care programs identify those youth who are about to "age out" at the age of 16 or 17, young people who are still foster youth – but who may currently be residing in juvenile court detention or treatment facilities – are sometimes not included in these assessments. Although probation officers who oversee juveniles are expected to advise and assist their wards with access to transitional living services, reports suggest this rarely occurs. This is not their fault – providing for such services is not mainly what juvenile probation officers do. It is what dependency social workers and the dependency judicial system are supposed to do.

For these reasons, when these youth age out from the juvenile delinquency system, rather than from the dependency court system, they are too often and for no public policy reason effectively denied access to programs designed to assist former foster youth.

When former foster youth receive access to these transitional living skills programs, the likelihood that they find jobs and housing increases, reducing the likelihood they will become homeless.

SB 945 would help ensure that every child who has grown into adulthood with our state as their parents, including those who have become a ward of the court, receive Independent Living Program (ILP) services and all other state services entitled to aging out former foster youth.

For these reasons, we ask for your support for this common sense, compassionate measure.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

cc: Senator Carol Liu
Ed Howard, Children's Advocacy Institute