

# SUPPORT SCHOOL STABILITY & SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE: HB 1808, 1809 & 1828 & SB 966 (& CO-SPONSORSHIP NO. 1399 & 1400)



## WHY STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE NEED HELP TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

- **Youth in foster care struggle to succeed and stay in school.** Roughly half don't graduate.
- **Frequent school moves set kids back.** Almost 1/3 of children who have been in foster care for 12-23 months have experienced three or more living placements—often changing schools with each new placement. It is estimated that students lose between 4-6 months of academic progress with each school move. This is why “school stability”—remaining in the same school unless a change is in the child's best interest—is so important.
- **Trouble in school leads to dropping out.** Too often, when children in foster care change schools, they miss school or are placed in the wrong classes. Often their credits do not transfer promptly and they have to repeat courses or grades. They lose hope, and, ultimately, drop out.

## HOW THE PROPOSED PA LAWS HELP CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE

The proposed bills work together to ensure school stability, immediate enrollment when a school change is needed, and prompt transfer of records and credits for children in foster care and other vulnerable populations.

- **Children and youth in foster care have a clear right to stay in the same school, with transportation when needed, unless a school change is in their best interest.** The legislation clarifies the process for deciding whether a school change is needed. It also explains how costs and responsibilities for providing transportation to support school stability are to be allocated in the most cost-effective and efficient manner: child welfare agencies cover transportation (often drawing down federal funds to support this) unless the local educational agency can provide transportation at no or negligible cost (such as utilizing existing bus routes).
- **Children and youth have a right to immediate enrollment and smooth transitions** when they change schools. Students in care will be able to enroll in a new school even without the documents usually required for enrollment. Education records must be immediately transferred. Each school

district must designate a school-based point of contact who will help assist students in care to become integrated into the new school community.

- **Children and youth receive needed supports to stay on track to graduate when they must move.** Youth must receive credits for work completed at previous schools, have opportunities to make up lost credits, have access to the full range of educational opportunities, and be positioned to graduate.

## THE PROPOSED LAWS HELP LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES

The proposed laws clarify the obligations of local educational agencies with respect to school stability, smooth school transitions, credit transfers, and more. When students in care succeed, schools benefit. These laws also provide uniformity across districts in, among other things, the development of school stability transportation plans and make clear that LEAs will only pay for transportation when they agree to do so or when they can do so at a negligible cost, such as relying on existing bus routes. This ensures that transportation is provided in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

## THE PROPOSED LAWS HELP CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES AND JUVENILE COURTS

The proposed laws will improve school and life outcomes for children in care and help child welfare agencies ensure the well-being of children as required under state and federal requirements. The bills clarify that child welfare agencies and the courts make school stability decisions. Under the legislation, local educational agencies cover the cost of transportation when there's no or negligible cost, which ensures it is provided in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

## WHY LEGISLATORS SHOULD SUPPORT THESE REFORMS

For many reasons, children in foster care routinely have very poor school outcomes. They need champions to help reverse this trend. Every year, hundreds of youth across Pennsylvania “age out” of foster care to a life they must create on their own. Without the support of family, education is often the only route to a better life. This legislation will help level the playing field for these vulnerable youth.

## THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION ENSURES PENNSYLVANIA COMPLIES WITH NEW FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

In December 2015, Congress passed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), the first federal education law to require state and local education agencies to support school stability for students in foster care and to report annually on the achievement and graduation rates of children in foster care. The proposed Pennsylvania laws fully align with ESSA's requirements—including ensuring school stability and designating points of contact at the state and local levels—and will allow the Commonwealth to document to federal authorities how it has complied with ESSA's new requirements.

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**Questions?** Contact Maura McInerney at [mmcinerney@elc-pa.org](mailto:mmcinerney@elc-pa.org) or Kate Burdick at [kburdick@jlc.org](mailto:kburdick@jlc.org).

