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New Bills Introduced in Congress Aim for Higher Education Success for Youth in Foster Care System, Experiencing Homelessness

Legislation is heralded by national advocacy organizations Juvenile Law Center, SchoolHouse Connection and National Network for Youth

WASHINGTON, DC (SEPTEMBER 13, 2017) - Advocacy organizations [Juvenile Law Center](#), [SchoolHouse Connection](#) and [National Network for Youth](#) strongly support the introduction in Congress yesterday of two bills that would significantly improve the chances for higher education success for youth experiencing homelessness and youth who have been in the foster care system.

[**The Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act \(S.1795/HR.3740\)**](#), sponsored by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) and by Representatives Katherine Clark (D-5th/MA) and Don Young (R-AK), and [**The Fostering Success in Higher Education Act of 201 \(S.1792/H.R.3742\)**](#), sponsored by Senator Al Franken (D-MN) and Representatives Danny K. Davis (D-7th/IL) and Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-8th/IL), provide powerful legislative solutions for youth who face some of the greatest challenges in accessing a college education.

“We have a special responsibility for youth who have been in foster care as well as to youth who are homeless,” said Jennifer Pokempner, Child Welfare Policy Director at Juvenile Law Center. “Helping them achieve their educational goals is really the least we can do to give them a fair shot at success as adults. Investing in their futures through the simple and effective strategies laid out in these two bills, which make our existing resources work more efficiently, makes sense for us all as a community.”

More than 1.3 million homeless children and youth are currently enrolled in U.S. public schools, and 415,000 children are in foster care. These youth face unique barriers to accessing and completing higher education. As a result, too few homeless and foster youth are able to enroll, afford, and graduate with a degree. Lack of family and support - coupled with histories of neglect, abuse, trauma, mobility, and deep poverty - creates roadblocks to their path to and through post-secondary education.

“Kids in foster care face an uphill battle when they pursue higher education. It is in all of our interests to help these kids who have aged out of the foster care system or have experienced homelessness and ensure that

services for them are a priority in existing federal programs,” said Senator Portman. “This common-sense legislation will remove unnecessary barriers and make college more affordable these youth. It will support college retention, and greater success in higher education to allow these youth people to graduate, pursue their dreams, and achieve their God-given potential.”

“The skyrocketing costs of college impact all students, but for homeless and foster students, the challenges they face far too often put higher education out of reach,” said Senator Murray. “I’m proud to introduce this legislation to provide support for homeless and foster students to access, afford and graduate from college, and I will keep fighting so every student who wants to join the middle class through higher education has the opportunity to do so.”

Higher education remains the best opportunity for economic independence and healthier lives for youth in the foster care system and youth experiencing homelessness. The bills will provide some of our most vulnerable youth a fair shot at success in their adult lives through education. The two bills seek to improve access, retention, and success by a few simple and effective strategies: streamlining access to existing financial aid and student supports and enhancing student supports for homeless and foster youth. These reforms will help students use existing resources efficiently and effectively and will enhance and build on student support programs that work.

“The legislation introduced yesterday addresses barriers that have created roadblocks to higher education for homeless and foster youth,” said Barbara Duffield, Executive Director of SchoolHouse Connection. “By removing these barriers, and by replicating best practices, the legislation opens the door to a healthier future for some of our nation’s most determined, resilient students.”

The **Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act** (HEASHFY) would:

- Streamline the application and verification process for financial aid for foster and homeless unaccompanied youth;
- Clarify eligibility for “independent” student status for homeless and foster youth;
- Have colleges and universities designate single points of contact to assist homeless and foster youth to access and complete higher education and connect them with resources;
- Have colleges and universities develop a plan to assist homeless and foster youth to access housing resources during and between academic terms;
- Include homeless and foster youth in the data collected by college access programs and identify ways they can further support these students; and
- Ensure college access programs collaborate with child welfare agencies, homeless service providers, and school district homeless liaisons to identify, conduct outreach to, and recruit homeless and foster youth.

The **Fostering Success in Higher Education Act of 2017** (FSHEA) would improve college access, retention, and completion rates for foster and homeless youth by substantially improving state capacity to support students by:

- Creating a new grant program in the Higher Education Act administered by the US Department of Education to provide \$150 million a year in formula grants to states, tribes, and territories to establish or expand statewide initiatives that assist foster and homeless youth in enrolling and graduating higher education; and
- Establishing formula grants to states based on a state’s share of foster youth and homeless youth among all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with a \$500,000 minimum grant; and

- Develop “institutions of excellence” committed to serving foster and homeless youth from entrance to completion via robust support services and by covering the remaining cost of attendance beyond federal and state grants; and
- Establish intensive, statewide transition initiatives to increase the understanding, preparation, and application of foster and homeless youth to higher education.

Juvenile Law Center is the oldest non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the nation. Widely published and internationally recognized as thought leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center’s impact on the development of law and policy on behalf of children is substantial. Juvenile Law Center uses an array of legal strategies and policy advocacy to promote fairness, prevent harm, ensure access to appropriate services, and create opportunities for success for youth in the foster care and justice systems. For more information about Juvenile Law Center’s work, visit www.JLC.org.

SchoolHouse Connection is a national organization promoting success for children and youth experiencing homelessness, from birth through higher education. SchoolHouse Connection engages in strategic advocacy and provides technical assistance in partnership with early care and education professionals (including school district homeless liaisons and state homeless education coordinators), young people, service providers, advocates, and local communities. For more information, visit www.schoolhouseconnection.org

The [National Network for Youth \(NN4Y\)](#) is the nation’s leading network of homeless and runaway youth programs. The Network champions the needs of runaway, homeless, and other disconnected youth through strengthening the capacity of community-based services, facilitating resource sharing, and educating the public and policy makers. NN4Y’s members serve homeless youth across the country, working collaboratively to prevent youth homelessness and the inherent risks of living on the streets, including exploitation, human trafficking, criminal justice involvement, or death.

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