
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Connie Leyva, Chair

2021 - 2022 Regular

Bill No:	SB 622	Hearing Date:	January 12, 2022
Author:	Roth		
Version:	March 10, 2021		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Lynn Lorber		

Subject: Student financial aid: State Department of Social Services: individuals serving foster youth.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Department of Social Services (DSS) to establish a program to provide tuition assistance to postgraduate students who are currently employed by, or who commit to seeking employment in, a county probation department serving foster youth and providing court-ordered placement services.

BACKGROUND

Existing federal law:

- 1) Provides for student loans through the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program, administered by the Federal Student Aid Office within the United States Department of Education. (United States Code, Title 20 § 1087a et seq.)
- 2) Establishes the Federal Work-Study Program, which provides part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need, allowing students to earn money to help pay education expenses. The program encourages community service work and work related to the student's course of study. (42 USC § 2751)

Existing state law:

- 3) Requires DSS to select and award a grant to a private nonprofit or public entity for the purpose of establishing a statewide multipurpose child welfare training program. (Welfare and Institutions Code § 16205)
- 4) Provides that the purpose of the child welfare training program is to develop and implement statewide coordinated training programs designed specifically to meet the needs of county child protective services social workers assigned to emergency response, family maintenance, family reunification, permanent placement, and adoption responsibilities. Existing law further states legislative intent for the program to include training for other agencies under contract with county welfare departments to provide child welfare services. (WIC § 16206(a))

ANALYSIS

This bill requires DSS to establish a program to provide tuition assistance to postgraduate students who are currently employed by, or who commit to seeking employment in, a county probation department serving foster youth and providing court-ordered placement services. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires DSS to establish a program to provide tuition assistance to individuals pursuing postgraduate degrees who are currently employed by, or who commit to seeking employment in, a qualifying agency serving foster youth.
- 2) Requires the tuition assistance program to do all of the following:
 - a) Facilitate postgraduate degrees for eligible individuals who directly work with foster youth and provide court-ordered placement services.
 - b) Prioritize the enrollment of eligible individuals who reflect the diversity of the state's foster youth population.
 - c) Prioritize the enrollment of current state, county, or tribal probation placement staff.
- 3) Requires DSS, upon appropriation of federal Title IV-E funds, to provide tuition assistance to eligible individuals while they attend any graduate school at the University of California, the California State University, or an independent institution of higher education.
- 4) Provides that an eligible individual is to apply to DSS for tuition assistance in a manner prescribed by DSS.
- 5) Requires DSS, on or before January 1, 2023, to adopt regulations to implement the provisions of this bill, and requires the regulations to include, but not be limited to, regulations related to the application criteria, the application process, data collection, and accountability for program expenditures.
- 6) Includes the following definitions:
 - a) "Eligible individual" means a person currently employed by a qualifying agency, or a person who meets the qualifications for employment in a qualifying agency.
 - b) "Qualifying agency" means a county probation department serving foster youth and providing court-ordered placement services.
 - c) "Tuition assistance" means a stipend or reimbursement for tuition, fees, books, and travel, as developed by DSS.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, "SB 622 will attract more highly trained probation officers who are attuned to the needs of foster children by establishing a tuition assistance program for graduate students who commit to

employment in a probation department that serves foster youth. It builds upon the already successful California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) program that, in contract with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), offers financial aid to Master of Social Work students in exchange for working in a public child welfare agency for at least 2 years. Once established, this new program will be incredibly cost-effective as each student's tuition stipend would be funded solely through federal Title IV-E monies. Additionally, in order to create a representative and knowledgeable cohort, this bill will direct CDSS to prioritize applicants who reflect the diversity of the state's foster youth population as well as current state, county, or tribal probation placement staff. The expansion to include financial aid opportunities for future foster youth placement probation officers is a logical next step in ensuring children that require care across our state are assisted by exceedingly qualified individuals."

- 2) ***Federal Title IV-E Stipend Program.*** As noted in the Senate Human Services Committee's analysis of this bill, through the federal Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act of 1980, Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (Title IV-E) provides federal matching funds for state administering foster care and adoption assistance programs. In addition to federal matching funds for state foster care programs, the Title IV-E Stipend Program was created to support training and education opportunities for current and prospective child welfare professionals.

The Title IV Stipend Program supports social work education to build and strengthen the child welfare workforce by disbursing funds through university partnerships that provide stipends to students pursuing a Bachelor's of Social Work and Master's of Social Work and who are employed or preparing for employment in a public child welfare agency. This allows students at participating universities across the country to receive stipends to help offset the cost of higher education in exchange for commitment of a career with a public child welfare agency. In California, the Title-IV Stipend Program is operated through the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC; see # 3 below).

This bill seeks to expand Title IV-E stipend funding to a person currently employed by, or who plans to be employed by, a county probation department serving foster youth and providing court-ordered placement services when the person attends any graduate school at the University of California, the California State University, or an independent institution of higher education. The purpose of this bill appears consistent with that of the Title IV-E Stipend Program.

However, the current Title-IV Stipend Program appears tied to specific educational opportunities, i.e. social work programs that increase the individual's knowledge, understanding, and skill set for providing services to foster youth. This bill does not specifically limit the area of study in which a participating student could seek their graduate degree. According to the author, the intent is to mirror the provisions of CalSWEC's Title IV-E program, limiting the program to those seeking a degree in social work. The author is working with DSS and stakeholders to clarify the ways the program created by this bill could mirror and connect with CalSWEC's Title IV-E program (it isn't as easy as expanding CalSWEC to include probation officers because probation officers don't

necessarily earn a degree in social work).

- 3) ***California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC).*** According to the Senate Human Services Committee's analysis of this bill, CalSWEC began in 1990 as a result of the academic community and the public social services sector joining together to improve the commitment of social workers to work in the public sector with vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families. CalSWEC followed a successful partnership wherein the Bay Area's county social services agencies and local graduate schools of social work forming a coalition focused on the improvement of services and an enhanced inter-county collaboration. This effort resulted in the Bay Area Social Services Consortium, which fully formed in 1987 as a partnership between seven county departments of social services and the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkley. Within a year it expanded to include nine county departments and three Bay Area schools of social work.

In 1989, the California Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the County Welfare Directors Association, and the state's ten graduate schools of social work came together to form a consortium of private and public agencies dedicated to developing a professional social service workforce to effectively serve California's diverse population. The goal of this partnerships was to redirect Master's of Social Work education in California toward increasing the numbers and improving the preparation of social workers for working in public services. Today, CalSWEC has grown to include 22 schools of social work across California, county and Tribal agencies, and other non-profits. Additionally, while CalSWEC initially focused on child welfare, it has since broadened its school to include the fields of mental/behavioral health and aging. CalSWEC's current mission states CalSWEC "facilitates and supports statewide partnerships for the education and training of social workers to ensure culturally responsive, effective, and high-quality health and social service delivery to the people of California."

- 4) ***Existing tuition assistance programs for graduate students.*** Tuition assistance programs for graduate students are extremely limited. In addition to CalSWEC (and loans), other tuition assistance programs include the Federal Work-Study Program, the federal Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants, and federal Pell Grants (only for some graduate teacher credential programs). California no longer funds the former Assumption Program of Loans for Education (for teachers). Staff notes that the Federal Work Study Program is the only tuition assistance program that is not linked to a specific area of study or professional field.
- 5) ***Uses of tuition assistance.*** This bill defines "tuition assistance" as a stipend or reimbursement for tuition, fees, books, and travel, as developed by DSS. The author may wish to consider also allowing tuition assistance to be used to support students' basic needs, such as food and housing.

SUPPORT

Chief Probation Officers of California

OPPOSITION

None received

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