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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Hurtado, Chair  
2021 - 2022 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 622

**Author:** Roth

**Version:** March 10, 2021

**Urgency:** No

**Consultant:** Marisa Shea

**Hearing Date:** April 6, 2021

**Fiscal:** Yes

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

### SUMMARY

This bill requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to create a program to provide tuition assistance to qualifying individuals pursuing postgraduate degrees 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.

### ABSTRACT

#### Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes a state and local system of child welfare services, including foster care, for children who have been adjudged by the court to be at risk of abuse and neglect or to have been abused or neglected, as specified. (*WIC 202*)
- 2) Establishes a system of juvenile dependency for children for specified reasons, and designates that a child who meets certain criteria is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court and may be adjudged as a dependent child of the court, as specified. (*WIC 300 et seq.*)
- 3) Requires CDSS 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. (*WIC 16205*)
- 4) States that the purpose of the child welfare training program is to 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. 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)*)

- 5) Federal law requires states to have a plan for child welfare services that has been developed jointly by the Secretary and designated state agency, as provided, which meets set requirements in order to be eligible for federal payments. (42 U.S.C 622)
- 6) Federal law requires states' child welfare services plans to include child welfare services staff development and training plans. (42 U.S.C. 622)

**This Bill:**

- 1) Requires CDSS 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. Further requires CDSS to, upon appropriation by the Legislature of funds received by the state pursuant to Title IV-E of the federal Social Security Act of 1935, to provide tuition assistance to eligible individuals while they attend in the state any graduate school at the University of California, the California State University, or an independent institution of higher education, as defined.
- 2) Requires the resulting tuition assistance program to do 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; and
  - c) Prioritize the enrollment of current state, county, or tribal probation placement staff.
- 3) Requires an eligible individual to apply to CDSS for tuition assistance in a manner prescribed by that department.
- 4) Requires CDSS, on or before January 1, 2023, to adopt regulations to implement this tuition assistance program. Further requires these regulations include, but not necessarily be limited to, regulations related to the application criteria, the application process, data collection, and accountability for program expenditures.
- 5) Defines the following terms for the purposes of this tuition assistance program:
  - 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 CDSS.

## FISCAL IMPACT

This bill has not yet been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

## BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

### **Purpose of 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.” The author goes on to note that SB 622 “builds upon the already successful California Social Work Education Center program that, in contract with the California Department of Social Services, offers financial aid to Master of Social Work students in exchange for working in a public child welfare agency for at least two years.” The author further states that the program created by this bill “will be incredibly cost-effective as each student’s tuition stipend would be funded solely through federal Title IV-E monies.” And, in order to ensure diversity within the program, the author reports that “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.” In sum, the author believes “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.”

### *Title IV-E Stipend Program*

Through the Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act of 1980, the federal government passed Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (Title IV-E) to provide federal matching funds for state administering foster care and adoption assistance programs. The intention behind Title IV-E was “to improve the quality of care of children in foster care, reduce the number of children in foster care, return children to their homes as soon as conditions permit, and facilitate the adoption or permanent placement of children who cannot be returned to their homes.” In addition to federal matching funds for state foster care programs, this resulted in the creation of the Title IV-E Stipend Program 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 work force by disbursing funds through university partnerships that provide stipends to Bachelor’s of Social Work and Master’s of Social Work students 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 their higher education in exchange for their pursuing a career with a public child welfare agency. In California, the Title-IV Stipend Program is operated through CalSWEC, which is discussed below.

This bill seeks to open 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 they attend any graduate school at the University of California, the California State University, or an independent institution of higher education, as provided. As the Title-IV stipend funding seems to have been intended to improve the workforce providing services to foster youth by providing further training and education to those working to serve the youth on behalf of the state, or in California's case the county, it makes sense to provide similar opportunities to probation officers serving foster youth. However, the current Title-IV Stipend Program seems tied to educational opportunities, i.e. social work programs that increase the individual's knowledge, understanding, and skill set for providing services to foster youth. As currently written, the bill does not specifically limit the area of study in which a participating, eligible individual could seek their higher education. However, the author's office and sponsors have expressed their intent that this bill mirror the provisions of CalSWEC's Title IV-E program, limiting this program to those seeking a degree in social work. Should this bill pass out of this committee, the author's office should continue working with CDSS and other stakeholders to clarify the ways the program created by this bill would mirror and connect with CalSWEC's Title IV-E program.

#### *California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC)*

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, or BASSC, 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, Berkeley, then lead by Dr. Harry Specht who initially pushed the idea. Within a year it expanded to include nine county departments and three Bay Area schools of social work – showing the need for such programing.

In 1989, the California Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), 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 the public services.<sup>1</sup> 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." In an effort to support this mission, CalSWEC reports having the following goals:

- Preparing a diverse group of social workers for careers in human services, with special emphasis in the fields of child welfare, integrated behavioral health, and aging;

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<sup>1</sup> [https://calswec.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/10-year\\_report\\_1.pdf](https://calswec.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/10-year_report_1.pdf)

- Define and operationalize a continuum of social work education and training;
- Engage in evaluation, research, and dissemination of best practices in social work.<sup>2</sup>

These goals are executed through CalSWEC's core programs: the Integrated Behavioral Health (IBH) Program, the Child Welfare In-Service Training Program, the Aging Initiative, and the Title IV-E Stipend Program. Through the IBH program, CalSWEC provides funding for the Mental Health Services Act Stipend Program for Master's of Social Work Students at California schools of social work who are planning careers in mental/behavioral health. The Aging Initiative is currently seeking partnerships to be able to do something similar for the recruitment and training of a competent geriatric workforce to support older Californians and their families. While the Child Welfare In-Service Training program is a statewide collaborative for in-service training and continuing professional training of child welfare professionals. The in-service training was formerly known as the Regional Training Academy project, and began in 1997 through a contract between CalSWEC and CDSS. Currently, the In-Service Training program includes the Common Core 3.0 for newly hired public child welfare workers at county agencies and the Supervisor Core training for newly promoted supervisors in Public Child Welfare agencies.<sup>3</sup>

CalSWEC also operates the Title IV-E Program in California, providing professional education and monetary support to undergraduate and graduate social work students who intend to pursue or continue a career in the field of public child welfare. The goals of CalSWEC's Title IV-E Program are: increasing the number of public child welfare workers with Master's of Social Work degrees; prioritizing the enrollment of current state/county/Tribal social services staff; prioritizing the enrollment of students who reflect the diversity of California's child welfare population; providing specific program support through the provision of monetary support to students; and providing specific program support through a specialized competency-based child welfare curriculum.<sup>4</sup> Title IV-E Stipend Program students are required to commit a number of years of service in state and county public child welfare agencies at least equally to the years of monetary support provided to them. A 2018 CalSWEC Title IV-E Retrospective Student Survey speaks to the success of the program. It found that:

- Nearly 93 percent of graduates completed (or were completing) the program's employment obligation.
- Title IV-E graduates worked an average of 6.2 years at their agency as a Title IV-E Social Worker.
- Title IV-E graduates worked an average of 3.5 years at their agency after their employment obligation was completed.
- Part-time graduates had the most prior experience and most years working at their employment obligation agencies.
- Nearly 20 percent of graduates were promoted to supervisor, 6 percent to managers, and 1 percent to directors in public child welfare agencies.
- The top reasons for leaving their agency or public child welfare were caseloads, agency culture/climate, and paperwork.

<sup>2</sup> <https://calswec.berkeley.edu/about/mission>

<sup>3</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZHCj8zVR4JqGbcLMcIilwFtsgMRY95g6UL3woG8OhK4/edit>

<sup>4</sup> <https://calswec.berkeley.edu/programs-and-services/calswec-title-iv-e-program>

**Related/Prior Legislation:**

*AB 1059 (De Leon, 2007)* would have created a new program, the Prekindergarten Assumption Program of Loans for Education, expanded available awards and created new eligibility criteria for the Child Development Teacher and Supervisor Grant program. This bill was held in the Senate Education Committee

*AB 935 (Hertzberg, Chapter 881, Statutes of 2001)* created the Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment Program for licensed attorneys who practice law or agree to practice in public interest areas of the law, as defined, and who meet other designated criteria.

*AB 957 (Migden, Chapter 721, Statutes of 1997)* provided 100 grants per year to child development students.

**POSITIONS****Support:**

Chief Probation Officers' of California (CPOC) (Sponsor)

**Oppose:**

None received.

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