

Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act of 2015

Sponsored by U.S. Senator Patty Murray

For many Americans, higher education can be a ticket to the middle class. Unfortunately, many homeless and foster youth face unique and significant barriers in higher education. More than 1.2 million homeless children and youth are currently enrolled in U.S. public schools, and 415,000 children are in foster care. Too few of these students are able to enroll in or afford college, let alone graduate with their degree, and homeless and foster youth often lack the support network to help them navigate a complicated higher education and financial aid system. The **Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act of 2015** would help remove some of these barriers and help ensure more students from all walks of life have strong and clear pathways into and through higher education.

This bill would require colleges and universities to do their part to improve outreach, resources, and policies for homeless and foster youth, including streamlining eligibility determinations for financial aid, providing housing options between terms, and designating a single point of contact for these vulnerable students. It also asks the federal government to provide ways to help resolve questions about a student's independence and ensure its programs identify, recruit, and prepare homeless and foster students for college. The bill asks states to grant in-state tuition rates for those students who haven't had stable residency. Additionally, the bill would:

Remove barriers and make college more affordable for homeless and foster youth:

- Clarify that youth under age 24 who are determined to be unaccompanied or homeless are considered independent students and can get the full financial aid they need;
- Ease the verification and determination process for homeless or unaccompanied youth;
- Remove the unnecessary and burdensome requirement that unaccompanied students must have their status re-determined every year unless conflicting information exists;
- Explain that foster care support and services that help foster youth survive do not count as "income" for purposes of calculating financial aid;
- Provide homeless and foster youth in-state tuition rates to reduce barriers to college attendance due to lack of financial support.

Support homeless and foster youth with college retention, success, and completion by having institutions of higher education:

- Develop a plan to assist homeless and foster youth to access housing resources during and between academic terms;
- Communicate the resources and financial aid available to homeless and foster youth;
- Designate a single point of contact to assist homeless and foster youth to access and complete higher education;
- Include homeless and foster youth in the data collected by college access programs and identify ways they can further support these students' participation and retention;
- Collaborate with child welfare agencies, homeless service providers, and school district homeless liaisons to identify, conduct outreach to, and recruit homeless and foster youth.