



March 20, 2022

The Hon. \_\_\_\_\_  
Capitol Office, CA State Assembly  
1021 "O" Street, P.O. Box 942849  
Sacramento, CA 94249

**Re: AB 1615 (TING)—SUPPORT AS PROPOSED TO BE AMENDED**

Dear Assembly Member,

The Foster Care Project (FCP) has been a long running ministry at All Saints Church. They have endorsed Assembly Bill SB 1615, Former Foster Youth Housing, and I am writing to express strong support for this bill. If passed, the legislation would reduce homelessness among former foster youth in California by improving supportive housing programs and maximizing federal housing assistance.

For eighteen years the Foster Care Project has worked on the issue of housing for youth transitioning out of foster care. For example, for over ten years they worked with other housing advocates in the city to convince Pasadena's City Council to convert a historic Julia Morgan building into housing for Transition Age Foster Youth (TAY) but failed to convince them of the financial viability of such a conversion. In addition they successfully wrote and advocated for the first density bonus bill for foster care (AB 2442. Density Bonuses for At-Risk Populations.

Historically, foster youth have experienced alarming rates of homelessness as they transition out of care. While California has taken great strides to address this, 1 in 4 foster youth experience homelessness after exiting care and before turning 23. For youth accessing the Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus), the rate is even higher—40% experience homelessness prior to entering the program. The Legislature established THP-Plus in 2001, which provides affordable housing and supportive services to more than 1,300 former foster youth aged 18 through 23 for up to 24 months.

AB 1615 would increase the program duration of THP-Plus from 24 months to 36 months and the upper age limit from 23 to 24. Counties have had the option to extend THP-Plus on a limited basis since 2015, when SB 1252 authorized the extension of THP-Plus for an additional year exclusively for youth enrolled in school. This optional extension has been regarded as effective: In a September 2021 survey of THP-Plus providers, at least 7 in 10 providers rated the extension for youth in school as very or extremely effective in assisting youth with staying in school, maintaining or improving their mental health, and achieving stable housing at exit. The current proposal would build on this policy, offering it on an equitable basis, regardless of school status or the county in which the youth lives.



In addition to THP-Plus, former foster youth ages 18 through 24 are eligible for one of two federal housing vouchers: the Family Unification Program (FUP) and the Foster Youth to Independence Initiative (FYI). These programs provide former foster youth with Housing Choice Vouchers and supportive services. While the FUP and FYI vouchers offer an opportunity to leverage federal funding, many counties report obstacles in utilizing this resource.

Specifically, some counties do not request vouchers or request few because they know they cannot offer the required supportive services without a dedicated funding source. Further, housing authorities cannot request additional vouchers unless 90% of their vouchers are utilized, meaning youth must be in active leases. This means that even when vouchers are in circulation, if youth are struggling to receive the support they need to secure housing, counties cannot request additional vouchers and youth who are in need remain on the waiting list.

California's Housing Navigators Program (HNP) provides an opportunity to address this issue. HNP was established in 2019 to provide housing navigation and maintenance services to youth ages 18 through 21. Some counties are using their HNP funding to provide housing navigation to youth with FUP and FYI vouchers, however, once a youth turns 22 they are no longer eligible to be served by HNP. Many youth require intensive housing search assistance to utilize the FUP and FYI vouchers and this misaligned age limit not only impacts a county's ability to maximize this resource but puts youth at risk of homelessness as they navigate the voucher process without support.

AB 1615 would align the state's Housing Navigators Program with federal voucher programs by changing the upper age limit from 21 to 24, expanding the priority population from foster youth to also include former foster youth, and changing the program's name to the "Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program."

Together, these provisions will help former foster youth achieve housing stability by improving California's supportive housing programs and ensuring the state can maximize federal housing assistance. I urge you to support and vote Aye on AB 1615.

Sincerely,

(Print Name) \_\_\_\_\_

(Address) \_\_\_\_\_

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