



## **The Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act**

*Sponsored by U.S. Senator Patty Murray and U.S. Senator Rob Portman*

For many working families, higher education can be a ticket to the middle class. Unfortunately, homeless and foster youth face unique and significant barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education. In U.S. public schools, more than 1.3 million children and youth are homeless and nearly 428,000 children are in foster care. However, far too few of these students are able to enroll in or afford the daunting costs of college, let alone graduate. 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** would help remove 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 the FAFSA and eligibility for financial aid, providing housing options between terms, and designating a single point of contact to help provide valuable services for these vulnerable students. It also requires the U.S. Department of Education to help resolve questions about a student's independence, publish useable data, 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:**

- Ease the verification and determination process for unaccompanied homeless youth or youth who are unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of being homeless, and foster children and youth;
- Remove the unnecessary and burdensome requirement that unaccompanied students must have their status re-determined every year unless conflicting information exists;
- Retain important documentation paperwork that often gets lost for homeless and foster youth, and can jeopardize access to financial aid and other critical supports;
- 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;
- 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 college retention, success, and completion of homeless and foster youth by having institutions of higher education:**

- Develop a plan to assist homeless and foster youth in accessing campus 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 in accessing institutional and community services and to support their ability to complete higher education;
- Include homeless and foster youth in the data collected by college access programs and identify ways they can further support student retention and success;
- Collaborate with child welfare agencies, homeless service providers, and school district homeless liaisons to identify, conduct outreach to, and recruit homeless and foster youth to college.