

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 673 (Jackson) – As Amended March 28, 2025

[Note: This bill was double referred to the Assembly Human Services Committee and will be heard by that Committee as it relates to issues under its jurisdiction.]

SUBJECT: Unaccompanied homeless pupils: Unaccompanied Youth Transitional Housing Program

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to administer the Unaccompanied Youth Transitional Housing Program as a pilot program, offering five-year competitive grants to local educational agencies (LEAs) to partner with local nonprofits and to fund transitional housing projects for unaccompanied homeless youth who are 16 and 17 years of age. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the CDE, in consultation with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and county offices of education (COEs), to administer competitive grants as part of a pilot program, known as the Unaccompanied Youth Transitional Housing Program, for purposes of enabling LEAs to partner with local nonprofits and to offer five-year grants to fund transitional housing projects for unaccompanied homeless youth who are 16 and 17 years of age.
- 2) Requires eligible uses of grant funds allocated under the program to include all of the following:
 - a) Referrals to a residential facility with single-occupant units that house minors separate from adults;
 - b) Provision of clothes, nutritious meals three times per day, and stipends for public transportation;
 - c) Educational support services and tutoring provided through an agreement with an LEA; and
 - d) Case management, preemployment and employment training and skill development, independent living, and health support and services; and subsidies or rental payments for residential facilities.
- 3) Requires funding preference under the program to be given to LEAs partnering with nonprofits that demonstrate the following:
 - a) A record of providing effective services to unaccompanied homeless youth;
 - b) Longstanding and successful partnerships with residential facilities; and
 - c) Significant experience working with unaccompanied homeless youth.

- 4) Defines the following:
- a) LEA to mean a school district, COE, or charter school;
 - b) “Nonprofit” to mean a nonprofit public benefit corporation; and
 - c) “Unaccompanied homeless youth” to refer to pupils who have been identified as homeless during the academic year and were not in the direct care of their parent or guardian at any time during the academic year at the selected reporting level.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Defines, in the McKinney-Vento Act, “homeless children and youths” as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes:
 - a) Children who are sharing the housing of others due to economic hardship, are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations, are living in emergency or transitional shelters, or are abandoned in hospitals;
 - b) Children who have a primary nighttime residence not designed or ordinarily used for sleeping;
 - c) Children who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - d) Migratory children who are living in the circumstances described above. (USC Title 42 Section 11434(a))
- 2) Provides a homeless student with specific rights and protections, including the right to immediate enrollment, and the right to continue education at the student’s school of origin for the duration of the student’s homelessness, according to the child’s or youth’s best interest. (USC Title 42 Section 11432 (g))
- 3) Requires a local educational agency (LEA) to ensure that each school within the LEA identifies all homeless children and youths and unaccompanied youths enrolled at the school. (Education Code (EC) 48851)
- 4) Requires each LEA liaison for homeless children and youths to ensure that homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies. (USC Title 24 Section 11432(g)(6)(A)(i))
- 5) Requires a school district, charter school, or COE to create a website containing the list of LEA liaisons for pupils in foster care and pupils who are homeless with contact information, and information on homelessness including educational rights and resources in that school district, charter school, or CDE. (EC 48852.6)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “As the author of Assembly Bill No. 673, I am committed to addressing the critical issue of homelessness among unaccompanied youth in California. These vulnerable minors often face significant challenges as they navigate life without the support of a parent or guardian, including limited access to safe housing, education, and essential services. This bill aims to provide a tangible solution by establishing the Unaccompanied Youth Transitional Housing Program, which will offer five-year grants to fund transitional housing projects specifically for unaccompanied homeless youth in key regions of the state, including the San Joaquin Central Valley, Northern California, and Southern California.

By implementing this program, we can offer unaccompanied homeless youth the opportunity to rebuild their lives, pursue their education, and contribute to their communities. California cannot afford to ignore the plight of these young people, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. I respectfully ask for your support for this critical piece of legislation.”

This bill lacks sufficient detail to ensure the safety of unaccompanied homeless youth, and the responsible use of public funds. The bill requires the CDE, in consultation with the CDSS, to administer competitive grants as part of a pilot program, for purposes of enabling LEAs to partner with local nonprofits and offer five-year grants to fund transitional housing projects for unaccompanied homeless youth who are 16 and 17 years of age. Supporting the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth is a laudable goal, however, this proposal lacks the information necessary for the CDE to establish a competitive grant program. ***The Committee may wish to consider*** that this bill grants a tremendous amount of authority to the CDE to develop the grants to LEAs with little to no guardrails to ensure the safety of unaccompanied homeless youth, and to be good stewards of public funds. The bill lacks clarity and sufficient information on a number of critical details, including:

- It is unclear how grant funds could or should be used to flow from the CDE, to LEA grantees, to partner nonprofits, or to youth themselves. The sponsor expressed a desire for youth to be issued debit cards with limitations on the cards to ensure the purchase of food, housing, transportation, and clothing. However, there is nothing in the bill that establishes those type of processes or guardrails on the funds. It is conceivable that either the youth or the adults charged with guiding the youth could have unlimited access to funds, which could be used for inappropriate purposes.
- The bill lacks a definition of a residential facility. It is unclear if the residential facilities would be licensed through the CDSS and Community Care Licensing, or some other mechanism. As written, and without a definition of a residential facility, grant funds could be used in any number of ways which have the potential to put children in harm’s way, including using a facility that is physically unsafe or staffed with adults that may not have the unaccompanied homeless youth’s best interests in mind. Unaccompanied homeless youth can be a very vulnerable population, and their safety and support should be paramount.
- Further, the bill lacks any specificity or requirements for the adults charged with the supervision and care of the unaccompanied youth. How can the public be assured that these adults supporting this extremely vulnerable population have the appropriate training

and experience? How can the public be assured that these adults have taken and cleared necessary background checks to ensure the safety of the youth in their care?

- The CDSS, among other federal, state, and local governments, provide a variety of programs to support this population. Given the lack of detail in this bill, is unclear how this bill would duplicate existing programs aimed at serving unaccompanied homeless youth which could potentially create confusion and use public funds inefficiently.
- The bill would require that eligible uses of grant funds include case management, preemployment and training and skill development, independent living, and health support and services. The bill does not specify that the case management and other services need to be aligned with existing efforts being made by other public agencies, or the LEA.
- As written, the bill states that grants are for LEAs to partner with local nonprofits to fund transitional housing grants for unaccompanied homeless youth who are 16 and 17 years of age. The bill lacks any specificity or standard for the CDE to determine how grantees could connect eligible youth with any services as they age out of eligibility, including services such as connecting youth with existing services of public agencies, or other qualified nonprofits serving eligible youth in order to avoid the unintended consequence of youth turning 18 with no public supports.
- The definition of unaccompanied homeless youth is not aligned to the McKinney-Vento Act, the widely used and understood federal law created to support youth experiencing homelessness. As noted below, the federal definition of homeless is very broad and inclusive, resulting in a variety of youth to be eligible for homeless services. This mismatch between the definition in the bill and the existing federal law will likely cause confusion in the field and cause some eligible youth to become ineligible for grant funds.
- The bill lacks any type of required reporting or accountability for the public funds to be used for the competitive grants. The bill does not make clear how the funds may, or may not, be used by grantees, nonprofit partners, adults implementing the grants, and the unaccompanied homeless youth. The bill does not include any specifics for grant reporting and outcomes to the CDE or to the Legislature and Governor. Without this type of data, as well as an evaluation of the grant, the state will lack sufficient information to inform future grant proposals on this topic, for this population.
- It is unclear what the goal of the pilot program is: is it to provide temporary housing for unaccompanied homeless youth? Is it to provide permanent housing for unaccompanied homeless youth? Is it to connect them with other services so the youth are neither homeless nor unaccompanied by the time they are no longer eligible for the grant at age 18? Is one of the goals to establish relationships between LEAs and local nonprofits?

In light of these concerns, *the Committee may wish to consider* whether this proposal may benefit from additional time to develop a more complete proposal and consider any unintended consequences.

How many California students experience homelessness? California schools identify homeless students using the definition of homeless students in the federal McKinney-Vento Act, which defines “homeless children and youths” as:

- Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- Children and youth who may be living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or shelters;
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are children who are living in similar circumstances listed above.

According to the CDE, in 2023-24 there were 286,853 California public school students who met the federal definition of homelessness, of which 8,831 are reported as unaccompanied homeless students. All homeless youth represent 4.8% of the total California public school student population. Over 17% of the students experiencing homelessness in the U.S. reside in California (Federal Data Summary, Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2020). According to a 2020 report by the UCLA Center for Transformation of Schools titled *State of Crisis: Dismantling Student Homelessness in California*, African American and Latino students are disproportionately represented among students experiencing homelessness.

2023-24 Homeless Student Enrollment by Dwelling Type, Unaccompanied Youth

Race / Ethnicity	Cumulative Enrollment (All students)	Homeless Student Enrollment	Temporarily Doubled-Up	Temporary Shelters	Hotels/Motels	Temporarily Unsheltered
African American	303,380	952	71.3%	16.2%	4.8%	7.7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	26,542	184	78.8%	9.8%	5.4%	6.0%
Asian	595,658	232	71.1%	18.5%	4.3%	6.0%
Filipino	132,555	67	82.1%	14.9%	1.5%	1.5%
Hispanic or Latino	3,382,089	5,258	80.4%	11.4%	2.0%	6.2%
Pacific Islander	24,994	53	84.9%	11.3%	1.9%	1.9%
White	1,216,294	1,536	81.8%	9.4%	1.9%	6.8%
Two or More Races	277,099	473	79.1%	8.9%	3.8%	8.2%

Not Reported	65,240	76	61.8%	19.7%	5.3%	13.2%
Statewide (Unaccompanied Homeless Youth)	6,023,851	8,831	79.2%	11.7%	2.6%	6.6%
Statewide (All Homeless Youth)	6,023,851	286,853	83.3%	7.0%	5.9%	3.9%

Source: CDE Dataquest

Unaccompanied homeless youth. The U.S. Department of Education notes that the presence of a custody or guardianship issue alone would not make a student eligible for McKinney-Vento services; rather, the student's living arrangement also must be considered homeless. With this federal definition in mind, the term "unaccompanied youth," typically refers to youth who are both unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness.

According to a 2022 brief from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Homeless Education, "Each year, as required by the U.S. Department of Education, schools collect data on the enrollment of children and youth experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth. During the 2014-2015 school year, U.S. public schools enrolled 95,032 unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness, up 21% from 78,654 during the 2012-2013 school year (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2016, p. 17). And yet, these data represent only school-age unaccompanied youth who were identified and enrolled by U.S. public schools. Actual numbers of youth experiencing homelessness on their own vary widely, depending on the definition and methodology used. With this in mind, experts estimate that as many as 1.7 million youth experience homelessness on their own in any given year (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002)."

Several existing programs to support homeless youth. There are a number of existing programs to support California's homeless youth, and many focus on serving young adults who are no longer minors. ***The Committee may wish to consider*** the value of adding another program targeting the same population.

- ***Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Grant Program:*** Administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, HHAP makes available grant allocations to cities, counties, and continuums of care with flexible funding to prevent and end homelessness in their regions. The grant program requires at least 10% of each HHAP allocation must be spent on services for homeless youth. Eligible uses of grant funds include operating expenses for new or existing non-congregate shelter sites and transitional housing for youth, youth-focused services in transitional housing, and motel or hotel vouchers.
- ***California Emergency Solutions and Housing (CESH) Program:*** Administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, the CESH Program provides funds for a variety of activities to assist persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness. CESH funds may be used for five primary activities: housing relocation and stabilization services (including rental assistance), operating subsidies for permanent housing, flexible housing subsidy funds, operating support for emergency housing interventions, and systems support for homelessness services and housing delivery

systems. In addition, some administrative entities may use CESH funds to develop or update a Coordinated Entry System, Homeless Management Information System, or Homelessness Plan. Eligible applicants are Administrative Entities (AEs) — local governments, non-profit organizations, or unified funding agencies — designated by the Continuum of Care (CoC) to administer CESH funds in their service area.

- *Transitional Housing Program for Non-Minor Dependents (THP-NMD)*: Administered by the California Department of Social Services, the THP-NMD is a supervised, supportive housing program for young adults (ages 18-21) who are in California's Extended Foster Care program. This program helps NMDs transition from foster care to independent living by providing safe housing, case management, and life skills development. NMDs have the right to voluntarily remain in (or re-enter) foster care, live in approved housing options, and receive support to develop life skills and self-sufficiency. County government supports the implementation of THP-NMD through licensed THP-NMD providers, subject to Health and Safety Code and Community Care Licensing regulations.
- *Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus)*: Administered by the California Department of Social Services, the THP-Plus Program provides housing options for young adults who exited foster care (including those supervised by the Juvenile Probation) on or after their 18th birthday, and offers housing and supportive services for 36 cumulative months or until the age of 25, whichever comes first. The goal of THP-Plus is to provide a safe living environment while helping participants develop the life skills needed to live independently. The housing models which may be offered in the THP-Plus program include apartments, single-family dwellings, condominiums, college dormitories, Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs) or Group Homes, and host family models.

Youth experiencing homelessness have poor educational outcomes. Research suggests that students experiencing homelessness hold educational aspirations like those of their peers—to graduate from high school and go on to college. What separates students experiencing homelessness from their peers are the challenges of their circumstances, often due to the cumulative effects of poverty and the instability and disruption of social relationships associated with high mobility. (Burns, 2021)

California students who experience homelessness have a significantly higher risk of poor educational outcomes than other students. The CDE's 2022 Dashboard data shows:

- 45.1% of homeless students were chronically absent versus 30% of all students;
- 5.5% of homeless students were suspended from school one or more times, versus 3.1% of all students;
- Homeless students were 62.9 points below standard on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in English Language Arts (versus all students at 12.2 below standard);
- Homeless students were 101.8 points on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in Mathematics (versus 51.7 points below for all students); and

- 74.4% of homeless students graduated from high school versus 87.4% of all students.

Liaison for students experiencing homelessness. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act requires every school district, county office of education, charter school, and special education local plan area to designate an appropriate person as liaison for children and youth experiencing homelessness. LEA liaisons have an obligation to support children and youth experiencing homelessness who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (unaccompanied youth). LEA liaisons must help unaccompanied youth select a school of attendance, receive transportation to and from the school of origin, and obtain a prompt and fair resolution of any disputes. LEA liaisons must also inform unaccompanied youth of their status as “independent” students for the purpose of applying to FAFSA and help verify their status.

Related legislation. AB 373 (Gipson), Chapter 327, Statutes of 2023, requires an LEA operating an intersession program to grant priority access to homeless and foster children and youth.

AB 408 (Quirk-Silva), Chapter 904, Statutes of 2022, requires LEAs to establish homeless education program policies consistent with federal law, requires homeless education liaisons to offer training to specified school staff, and requires the CDE to develop a risk-based monitoring plan for homeless education requirements.

AB 2375 (Luz Rivas), Chapter 912, Statutes of 2022, requires LEAs and charter schools to identify all homeless children and youth and unaccompanied youth enrolled at the school by administering a housing questionnaire based on specified best practices.

SB 532 (Caballero) Chapter 918, Statutes of 2022, expands the rights for foster youth, homeless youth, former juvenile court school students, children of military families, migratory children, and students participating in a newcomer program (highly mobile students) to be exempted from local graduation requirements if certain conditions are met; requires LEAs to provide these students the option to remain in school for a fifth year to complete the statewide coursework requirements if certain conditions are met; specifies the contents of transcripts when transferred to a new LEA; and requires LEAs to annually report to the CDE on the number of students, who in the prior school year, graduated with an exemption from the LEA's local graduation requirements.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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