



Assembly Bill 243: Postsecondary education: student financial aid dependency status: juvenile case file inspection.

SUMMARY

Assembly Bill (AB) 243 would reduce barriers to accessing higher education for systems-involved youth.

BACKGROUND

Under current law, information concerning a minor in juvenile court proceedings is generally confidential. Access to juvenile case files is restricted, and only specific individuals are authorized to inspect these files. This includes local child support agencies that establish paternity and enforce child support orders, members of multidisciplinary teams working with children, and those providing treatment or supervision for the minor.

Access to juvenile case files for justice-involved youth and those served by the child welfare system is prohibited unless a court orders it or specific statutory exemptions apply. As these youth pursue their educational goals, many apply to and attend colleges, universities, and technical schools, whether online or in person. However, they often face obstacles that can hinder their pursuit of higher education, particularly the need for documentation that includes confidential juvenile case file information when applying for financial aid or during the application and enrollment processes. These barriers can cause delays that may discourage youth from pursuing post-secondary education, disproportionately affecting Latino and Black communities, which are overrepresented among system-involved youth.

These young people may also need to share confidential case file information to seek academic accommodations, register for classes, or apply for competitive private scholarships. Following juvenile justice realignment legislation in 2020 and 2021, youth and young adults up to age 25 are now supervised locally in county

probation department juvenile facilities and throughout the community.

PROBLEM

A specific group of young individuals, referred to as "systems-involved youth," are those who find themselves entangled in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems. These individuals often face significant challenges when trying to gain admission to colleges and universities or seeking financial aid. These difficulties primarily arise from their struggles to demonstrate financial independence from their parents. Moreover, they may have trouble proving their eligibility for necessary accommodations related to medical needs, disabilities, or other exceptional circumstances.

To navigate these complexities, many of these youth may turn to county or local education agencies (LEAs) staff members for guidance and support in articulating their needs effectively. However, a significant barrier remains: without a formal court order, critical information contained in juvenile case files—including the fact that the youth is under the supervision of juvenile probation (regardless of whether they are currently in custody) or is involved with the child welfare system—cannot be shared with financial aid offices or institutions of higher education. This legal restriction can hinder their access to the educational opportunities and resources they desperately need.

SOLUTION

This bill mandates that most public higher education institutions in the state accept proof of financial independence and confirmation provided by a local education agency or county probation or welfare department. Additionally, the bill establishes a narrow exemption that allows the disclosure of limited juvenile

case file information if the confirmation is deemed insufficient or for specific educational purposes.

SUPPORT

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