September 16, 2019

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: REQUEST TO SIGN SB 150 (BEALL) — IMPROVING CHAFEE GRANT ADMINISTRATION

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, we are writing to respectfully request your signature on Senate Bill 150, authored by Senator Jim Beall and co-sponsored by the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce and John Burton Advocates for Youth. With your support, SB 150 will increase the rate of college success among California’s foster youth by improving access to the Chafee Grant program, which provides up to a maximum of $5,000 in state financial aid for current and former foster youth who are enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program.

We recognize the strong connection between our state’s ability to sustain a thriving economy and the educational success of our most vulnerable students. With the nation’s largest foster care system here in Los Angeles County, it is vital that foster youth be able to complete a postsecondary education. While our state has made important strides in improving outcomes for youth as they age out of foster care, we continue to fall short in helping foster youth achieve a postsecondary education. By age 26, just 4% of former foster youth have achieved a college degree, compared to 36% of same-age young adults.

Evidence shows that receiving financial aid is a strong predictor of college success—positively impacting grade point average, transfer rates, and degree attainment, however, many foster youth who qualify for the Chafee Grant do not receive their funds in a timely manner, and many lose their Chafee Grant at the time when they need this support the most.

SB 150 would help us reverse these trends and make good on our promise to foster youth in our care:

**SB 150 gets foster youth their financial aid when they need it.** Currently, most foster youth receive the Chafee Grant late in the school year. Data provided by the California Student Aid Commission showed that during the 2017-18 academic year, 57% of Chafee recipients did not receive their fall 2017 funds until well after the term had ended—in January 2018 or later. Moreover, a full 13% did not receive their funds until after the school year had already concluded. SB 150 will ensure foster youth receive their grant at the start of the academic term, so that they can cover expenses like textbooks, housing, childcare, and transportation.

**By improving Chafee distribution, SB 150 increases retention of foster youth in college.** Currently, foster youth receive the Chafee Grant late in the school year, which makes it difficult to cover their school expenses and stay enrolled in college. As a result, only 34% of foster youth enrolled in community college successfully complete at least 30 units. Without a family to offer financial and in-kind support, foster youth are particularly reliant on financial aid. SB 150 will increase retention by ensuring foster youth have their financial aid at the start of the academic term.

**SB 150 honors the state’s unique commitment to foster youth.** The main goal of California’s foster care system is to achieve legal permanence for children who are removed from their homes by achieving timely reunification with their biological families or achieving adoption or guardianship. For the very small number of youth who are eligible to receive the Chafee Grant, this goal has not been met by the state. As these older youth exit out of the foster care system, they will face the challenges of young adulthood alone, without the
financial and in-kind supports typically provided by family members. By replacing the Chafee Grant’s existing Satisfactory Academic Progress requirement with more flexible standards, SB 150 acknowledges the unique circumstances of this small, but very vulnerable group of young people. SB 150 ensures that the Chafee Grant will be there to help foster youth as they complete a postsecondary education that can launch them into fulfilling careers and help them avoid the costly negative outcomes that too many of our former foster youth continue to face.

In summary, SB 150 will expand access to the Chafee Grant by recognizing the unique barriers foster youth face and modernize our state financial aid programs to better serve our highest needs students.

The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce strongly supports this valuable bill, and we urge you sign SB 150 into law.

Sincerely,

Maria Salinas
President and CEO
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce

David Rattray
Executive Vice President, Center for Education Excellence and Talent Development
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce