



# TIPS FOR HOMELESS HIGHER EDUCATION LIAISONS IN CALIFORNIA

[Updated January 2020]

Many institutions of higher education are designating liaisons for students experiencing homelessness. Similar to their counterparts in K-12 education, homeless higher education liaisons support students by connecting them to available resources on and off campus, and removing barriers to their college retention and success. Under California's [AB 801](#), each post-secondary educational institution must designate a staff member to serve as the Homeless and Foster Student Liaison, responsible for informing students about financial aid and other assistance available to them and assisting them to apply for and receive federal and state financial aid and available services. This tip sheet provides basic strategies and legal summaries for higher education liaisons in California to better support their students.

## 1. Train faculty and staff to become aware of signs that any student on campus may be experiencing homelessness.

### What is homelessness?

- Sharing housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- Staying in an emergency or transitional shelter
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, or similar settings

### What are the signs of homelessness?

- Students staying late on campus until buildings (library, student center, etc.) close
- Social behavioral changes like withdrawal, aggression, clinginess, difficulty with peer and/or adult relationships
- Lack of participation in class, poor attention span
- Poor hygiene, unmet medical/dental needs, wearing the same clothes repeatedly, fatigue, sickness

## 2. Ensure that faculty, staff, and students are aware of your role as a homeless higher education liaison.

- Send an introductory email to all students informing them of your role and the resources the institution provides.
- Include contact information about the homeless higher education liaison during orientation and consistently during the school year.
- Host training for faculty and staff to learn more about homeless students on campus and how they can support them.
- Participate in Resident Assistant or other student leadership training to ensure that student leaders are aware of the homeless liaison's role.



- Encourage faculty members to include a note on their syllabus about the homeless liaison position and resources available on campus that address basic needs.
- Create a clear, accessible referral system where students, faculty, and staff can easily refer students to you.

### **3. Create a comfortable, relaxing office space for students. Students should feel safe and welcome.**

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### **4. Establish strong relationships with key partners on and off-campus.**

- Host annual trainings with specific key offices that interact with students experiencing homelessness.
- Consider having office-based liaisons or specific points of contact in key offices that have specialized training in homelessness.
- [Financial Aid](#)
  - Partner with financial aid office to obtain aggregate data of students who indicated independent status on the FAFSA, and send them information on support programs or resources. Be sure to be mindful of and comply with all privacy and Higher Education Act laws.
  - Work with financial aid to mitigate the challenges students experiencing homelessness face with the FAFSA determination process.
  - Remind students that they can fill out the FAFSA starting on October 1st and that you can provide assistance if needed.
  - Under [AB 801](#), Homeless and Foster liaisons are responsible for understanding the provisions of the federal Higher Education Act pertaining to the financial aid eligibility of current and former foster youth and homeless youth, and must inform current and prospective students about student financial aid and other assistance available to them, including their eligibility as independent students.
- [Housing](#)
  - Partner with student housing to establish a temporary emergency housing plan, options, or a program. If your institution doesn't have residence halls, consider a host home program or partnering with local hotel/motels.



- Advocate for housing to remain open during winter and summer breaks. If not, work with students to come up with a housing plan for those times.
- Establish relationships with housing providers to create college-focused rapid rehousing models, as provided for by [AB 74](#).
- The Community
  - Assist the student in applying for all federal, state, and local services, including public benefits like CalFresh or Medicaid.
  - Establish personal connections with shelters, non-profits, or other homeless services in the area that specialize in and are safe for youth and young adults. Some communities may have a committee of people that organize, meet monthly, and share resources and support.

## **5. Routinely follow up with students to monitor their academic progress as well as their physical and emotional well-being.**

- Find out how each student prefers to communicate (texting, emailing, phone, etc.).
- Help students design a short-term and long-term plan with tangible outcomes and goals.
- Empower and challenge students to advocate for themselves and for changes at the institution that better support students experiencing homelessness.
- Schedule regular check-up meetings with students.

## **6. Continue your own professional development and training by reading tips sheets and watching webinars hosted by:**

- [SchoolHouse Connection](#), [National Center for Homeless Education](#), or [John Burton Advocates for Youth](#).

## **California Laws on Higher Education and Homelessness**

### [AB 801](#)

AB 801 requires California State University (CSU) and California Community College (CCC) to give priority class enrollment to verified current and former homeless youth and to former foster youth. The University of California (UC) campuses are requested to provide priority enrollment. It also requires post-secondary institutions to designate at least one liaison on each campus for these students. The liaison is tasked with identifying resources available to students experiencing homelessness and foster youth, informing students about these resources, and helping with application processes. Additionally, AB 801 provides current and former homeless youth with automatic eligibility for a California College Promise Grant fee waiver at the CCCs, which waives college tuition for the duration of the student's enrollment (so long as they maintain eligibility).

### [AB 1228](#)

UC and CSU campuses that maintain student housing facilities must, and community college campuses that maintain student housing facilities are requested to 1) give priority for housing to current and former homeless youth and foster youth; 2) give first priority for housing open during school breaks or year-round to current and former homeless youth and foster youth and provide this housing to current and former homeless youth and foster youth during academic breaks at no extra cost. In addition, California State University, University of California, and community college campuses are requested to



develop a plan to ensure that current and former homeless youth and foster youth can access housing resources as needed during and between academic terms.

#### [AB 74](#)

In the 2019-20 State Budget, \$19 million was allocated annually to California’s three public post-secondary institutions to be used to support Rapid Rehousing efforts that assist homeless and housing insecure college students. Campuses must use this funding to establish partnerships with organizations that have a tradition of helping populations experiencing homelessness to provide wrap-around services and rental subsidies for students. Authorized uses of funds include, but are not limited to: connecting students with community case managers who have knowledge and expertise in accessing safety net resources; establishing ongoing emergency housing procedures, including on-campus and off-campus resources; and emergency grants that are necessary to secure housing or to prevent the imminent loss of housing.

#### [AB 1747](#)

AB 1747 increases the likelihood that on-campus restaurants and cafeterias participate in the Restaurant Meals Program, which allows students to buy prepared food with their CalFresh dollars. AB 1747 particularly benefits students experiencing homelessness who may not have a place to store food and cook meals. It established a funding account to support collaborations between on-campus food pantries and CDSS-contracting food banks. It also improves access to funds for CalFresh outreach at California’s public campuses.

#### [AB 214](#)

In an effort to increase CalFresh enrollment, the California Student Aid Commission now notifies Cal Grant recipients who meet eligibility requirements under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program about their potential eligibility for CalFresh. A college student who is enrolled at least half-time must also work at least 20 hours per week or qualify for a work exemption in order to be eligible for CalFresh. AB 214 requires the Department of Social Services to create and maintain a list of college programs that allow students to be exempt from the CalFresh work requirement. This builds on [AB 1930](#), which allows certain college programs to count as “employment training programs”—increasing the likelihood of students receiving work exemptions and being eligible for CalFresh.

#### **Resources:**

- [Youth Homelessness and Higher Education Overview](#)
- [Tip Sheets for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed](#)
- [Archived Webinar on Learning from Higher Education Liaisons: Best Practices in Supporting Homeless College Students Pt 1 featuring California institutions](#)
- [Five Practical Guides to Support Homeless and Low-Income College Students in California](#)
- [Measuring Our Success: Campus Supports for College Students Experiencing Food & Housing Insecurity](#)
- [Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness: Perspectives from California's Community Colleges](#)
- [California Community Colleges #RealCollege Survey](#)