

# TIPS FOR CALIFORNIA HOMELESS HIGHER EDUCATION LIAISONS

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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 by removing barriers to 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 SOME SIGNS OF HOMELESSNESS?**

- Students staying late or sleeping on campus until buildings close, like the library, student center, 24 hour study rooms, etc.
- Social behavioral changes like withdrawal, aggression, clinginess, difficulty with peer and/or adult relationships
- Lack of participation in class, poor attention span, or sudden decline in academic achievement
- 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.
- Ensure your contact information is shared during orientation and consistently during the school year. Make sure that your email is clearly visible on the website.
- Host training for faculty and staff to learn more about homeless students on campus and how they can support them.
- Participate in Resident Assistant (RA) 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.**

- Provide clear instructions on how to get to your office by providing a map, or offer to meet students somewhere else on campus.
- Make confidentiality a priority. Don't require students to share specific details about the events that led to their lack of housing. Sharing these details may be emotionally difficult and is not necessary to provide assistance.
- Ask students what efforts they're already making to address their basic needs before offering advice.
- Be compassionate, but direct, and make sure students know you have their best interest in mind.
- If available, offer snacks or other food to students. Food in your office might be the first meal students have eaten all day.
- Help students make connections with additional resources on campus (housing, counseling, food pantry, clothing closets, etc.) or in the community.
- Build rapport with students and learn about their interests, major, school activities, etc.

### **4. ESTABLISH STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY PARTNERS ON AND OFF CAMPUS.**

- Establish a relationship with K-12 McKinney-Vento liaisons to assist with the identification and transition of youth who are homeless entering from high school.
- 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.

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## 4. ESTABLISH STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY PARTNERS ON AND OFF CAMPUS (CONT).

### • **Financial Aid**

- While it is important to be mindful of and comply with the Higher Education Act and privacy laws, partner with the financial aid office or admissions office to obtain aggregate data of students who indicated independent status on the FAFSA or their college application, and send them information on support programs and resources.
- 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.
- Under [AB 2416](#) public and private colleges and universities must consider homelessness as an extenuating circumstance for students who are otherwise unable to meet the requirements for [Satisfactory Academic Progress \(SAP\)](#) needed to maintain state-authorized student financial aid programs.

### • **Housing**

- Partner with student housing to establish a temporary emergency housing plan, options, or program. If your institution doesn't have residence halls, consider a host home program or partnering with local hotel/motels or community agencies.
- Advocate for student housing to remain open during all academic breaks, including, winter, spring, and summer breaks. If this is not possible, 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 students in applying for all federal, state, and local services, including public benefits like [CalFresh](#) or [Medi-Cal](#).
- 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-in meetings with students.

Continue your own professional development and training by reading tip sheets and watching webinars hosted by [SchoolHouse Connection](#) and [John Burton Advocates for Youth](#).

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### **CALIFORNIA LAWS**

#### 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).

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#### 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.

## **CALIFORNIA LAWS (CONT)**

### **AB 2416**

Public and private colleges and universities must consider homelessness as an extenuating circumstance for students who are otherwise unable to meet the requirements for “satisfactory academic progress” (SAP) needed to maintain state-authorized student financial aid programs.

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### **AB 74**

In the 2019-20 State Budget, \$19 million was allocated annually to California’s three public postsecondary 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.

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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.

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### **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.

# CALIFORNIA LAWS (CONT)

## 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](#)

### California Specific:

- [Financial Aid](#)
- [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](#)
- [Archived Webinar on College, COVID-19, and Homelessness: Building Partnerships](#)
- [Archived Webinar on How a Small Rural Community College Supports Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Making Youth Homelessness Visible with Data Visualization](#)