



**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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***Governor Signs Legislation to Improve Life for Foster Youth***

**LOS ANGELES, CA** – Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger this week signed a series of laws that will substantially enhance the lives of the nearly 100,000 abused and neglected foster youth under the jurisdiction of California's dependency courts. "I signed into law legislation that will improve foster care services," Governor Schwarzenegger announced upon signing the measures "It is very important to continue putting our children first and doing everything we can to protect their well-being."

These bills, sponsored by the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles and other child advocacy organizations, promote permanent, loving homes for foster youth, provide better support for youth leaving the foster care system, and provide housing and enhanced strategies for young teen parents in foster care. California's action on these measures is especially important since our huge foster care population represents approximately one in five of the nation's total foster youth.

"This legislation makes significant strides in ongoing efforts to chart a better future for the most vulnerable children in our community," said Children's Law Center Executive Director Miriam Krinsky. "These concrete and positive reforms in our state law are a direct outgrowth of the experience and observations of the Children's Law Center staff, who represent close to 25,000 foster youth in dependency court."

"Approximately one third of former foster youth will be on public assistance shortly after aging out of the system. Emancipated youth are at a critical juncture in their lives when supportive services can help them to become successful, healthy and productive citizens. Without services, they are vulnerable to becoming another tragic statistic," commented Assembly Member Judy Chu. "I applaud the Governor for signing AB 824 that will extend important transitional housing support services to foster youth leaving the child welfare system up to the age of 24 and help them on their way to self-sufficiency."

The key bills are as follows:

***SB 500 - Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Foster Care*** (authored by Senator Sheila Kuehl and sponsored by CLC and the County Welfare Directors Association of California) declares that a child whose parent is also a dependent of the court shall not be found at risk of abuse or neglect solely because of the age, dependent status, or foster care status of the parent. The bill removes barriers to receiving federal funds for children living with their dependent parent under the jurisdiction of the court and requires the creation of a shared responsibility plan designed to support the teen parent.

***AB 519 – Addressing the “Legal Orphan” problem*** (authored by Asm. Mark Leno and co-sponsored by CLC and the Judicial Council) will allow a former foster child, in limited and exceptional cases, to petition the court to reinstate parental rights. Under existing law, there is no way - absent a finding of fraud - to undo a termination of parental rights for children who become “legal orphans,” even if changed circumstances exist and children unlikely to be adopted would benefit from a renewed legal relationship with their parents. This bill will address the difficult plight of these legal orphans by creating a vehicle for restoring family times, when in the best interest of the child.

***SB 436 – Transitional Housing Program Plus*** (authored by Senator Carole Migden and sponsored by CLC, Honoring Emancipated Youth, Alameda County Foster Youth Alliance, and Campaign for Safe Transitions) requires counties to identify transitional housing resources for parenting and pregnant teens, report on the sufficiency of these resources, and identify a plan for meeting unmet needs of the emancipating pregnant and parenting teens in their county.

***AB 824 - Transitional Housing Program Plus*** (authored by Asm. Judy Chu and sponsored by CLC, Honoring Emancipated Youth, Alameda County Foster Youth Alliance, and Campaign for Safe Transitions) extends the age of eligibility for Transitional Housing - - a critical resource for the thousands of youth who “age out” of foster care yearly - - from 21 to 24.

***AB 1261 – Foster children: education*** (authored by Asm Mark Leno and sponsored by CLC) strengthens and clarifies existing educational protections provided by *AB 490*, 2003 legislation co-sponsored by CLC and the California Youth Connection. The bill ensures that former foster youth have access to their vital health and education records by requiring county welfare departments to provide this information to the child when they come of age.

***AB 1412 - Dependent children: out-of-home placements*** (authored by Asm. Mark Leno and sponsored by California Youth Connection) promotes the cultivation of supportive relationships between foster youth and mentors, which will result in valuable, life-long relationships with people who can help foster children succeed. In addition this legislation allows foster youth to participate in their own case planning and gives them a voice in their lives and future.

CLC has also worked with Asm Karen Bass on her plans to launch a Select Committee to address the needs and challenges facing California’s foster youth. This committee will conduct hearings throughout the state to gather information from professionals and community members expert in the challenges facing our child welfare system and committed to forging new approaches. Hearings for the Select Committee will begin this Fall.

For more information about the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles, visit [www.clcla.org](http://www.clcla.org).

*Children's Law Center of Los Angeles is a nonprofit, public interest law corporation whose staff of lawyers, paralegals and investigator/social workers serve as the "voice" in the foster care system for the vast majority of children under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles dependency court.*