



Children's Law Center of Los Angeles

September 28, 2004
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Executive Director
Children's Law Center of Los Angeles
(323) 980-1712

Governor Schwarzenegger Signs Education Works! Bill Into Law *New law supports higher education for foster youth*

LOS ANGELES, CA – One of the latest bills signed by the Governor has the potential to open up educational opportunities for California's many thousands of foster youth. SB 1639, the "Education Works!" bill, has the potential to increase access to higher education and training for foster care students by reducing informational barriers.

"We fail to equip many youth in the foster care system with the fundamental building blocks needed for a stable and successful adult future," stated Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Executive Director of the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, which serves as appointed counsel for the vast majority of the approximately 27,000 youth under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles County dependency court. "This new law will provide critical information about higher education to California's foster youth and encourage them to pursue educational opportunities that will empower them to face their future with confidence, so they can break the ongoing cycle of abuse, neglect, and despair."

The law adds to the Foster Care Bill of Rights the requirement that foster youth have access to information regarding financial aid for postsecondary education and the educational options available. SB 1639 encourages the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California to disseminate information to foster care agencies regarding admissions requirements and financial aid.

Despite the fact that 95% of foster youth want to pursue postsecondary education, only 25% of foster youth actually do so. "Foster youth have cited lack of information on options as one of the reasons why they do not pursue their education past the high school level. In the absence of postsecondary education and training opportunities ... foster youth are challenged to find jobs that offer opportunities for advancement or economic stability," said Michele Byrnes of Honoring Emancipated Youth, one of the bill's sponsors. "Emancipated foster youth have been shown to be three times more likely to rely on public assistance than other youth their age. This law will help former foster youth visualize their future, by giving them the tools they need to become financially independent."

"We hope that this legislation can lead to better opportunities for foster youth and community college students," said Roger Clay, President of the National Economic Development and Law Center, another of the bill's sponsors. "We hope to work with the legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger next year to continue to promote economic self-sufficiency, so that all California families can find economic security and have the opportunity to get ahead."

####