

DATE: June 4, 2021

TO: Members of the Pennsylvania State Senate Education Committee and Senate Leadership

FROM: Organizations and professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth who experience homelessness or have experience in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, as well as individuals who have directly experienced these challenges.

RE: **Support for S.B. 324, Fostering A Smooth Transition for Graduation**

Dear Senators,

We are writing to urge you to support Senate Bill 324, which was introduced by Senators Langerholc and Browne and has bipartisan support.^[1] This bill will help youth who have experienced homelessness, foster care, or juvenile justice involvement to stay on track to graduate from high school.

Despite working hard, students who are experiencing homelessness, or who have experience in the foster care or juvenile justice systems, are at high risk of not graduating high school. These highly mobile students want to obtain a high school diploma, yet face an onslaught of unique challenges in doing so. They frequently have to change schools mid-term, and as such do not earn full academic credit for the schoolwork they successfully completed. Their course credits are often not properly documented, and their school records are often lost. Typically, courses students take in residential placements do not align with state standards or the home district's curricula. And, when students transition to a new school, there is usually no one designated to welcome them and help them navigate the difficult process of determining appropriate courses, getting connected to necessary services, and making a plan to ensure they can graduate on time despite the education interruptions they endured.

As Amber, a Youth Fostering Change Youth Advocate with Juvenile Law Center lamented, "I had a big problem with my credits not transferring during this time, and no one helped me track down my credits. No one could locate my credits from my last school." Qilah, a Juveniles for Justice Youth Advocate with Juvenile Law Center suggested, "I wish I had more support to prepare for college or had someone who could guarantee my educational transition would be successful."

S.B. 324 breaks down needless barriers and enables students to focus on their own school success. The bill creates a uniform statewide process to help youth who have experienced education instability through: graduation planning requirements; credit transfer, waiver, and make-up provisions; greater access to extra-curricular activities; and more flexible diploma options while still complying with rigorous statewide academic standards. Importantly, the bill directs schools to designate a point of contact with specific responsibilities designed to ease the student's transition to the new school and help the student graduate on time.

The below-signed are organizations and professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children who experience homelessness or are system involved, as well as individuals who have directly experienced these challenges. We urge you to support S.B. 324 to bring graduation within the reach of these students.

Sincerely,

Organizations

Education Law Center-PA
 Juvenile Law Center
 CASA of Philadelphia County
 CASA of Warren and Forest Counties
 CASA Youth Advocates, Delaware and Chester Counties
 Centre County Public Defender
 Chester Education Foundation
 Child Advocacy Unit, Defender Association of Philadelphia
 Community Legal Services
 Delaware County Office of the Public Defender
 Girls Justice League
 Gwen's Girls
 HELP: MLP
 Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP)
 Institute on Disabilities
 Juvenile Defenders Association of Pennsylvania (JDAP)
 PCares
 Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
 People's Emergency Center
 Public Citizens for Children and Youth
 Support Center for Child Advocates
 The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research at the University
 of Pennsylvania
 The Village of Arts & Humanities
 Turning Points for Children
 Vision for Equality, Inc.
 Women Against Abuse
 Youth Sentencing & Reentry Project (YSRP)

Individuals

Joshua Chodrow	Fayette
Clarissa Shirk	Clinton
Kiara Castillo	Monroe
Daniel Tursack	Montgomery
Donna E. Ostroff	
Scott A. Dengler	
Annie Steinberg, M.D.	
Bikem Ayse Polat, Temple University	Montgomery
Melissa DeMotta, Berks County Intermediate Unit	Berks
Deusdedith Damasceno	
Rachel Rosnick	Chester
Jaclyn M. Nagle, MPA, BCEA	Allegheny
Carmen R. Labrador	Berks
Cheryl Sobeski-Reedy, Esquire, Luzerne County Public Defender's Office	
Tracey York, Berks Coalition to End Homelessness	Luzerne County
Steve Gill	Berks

Ryan Gruber	Philadelphia
Lauren Hammond	Berks
Frank L. Cecchetti, Esq.	Montgomery
Amber Stine	Allegheny
Erica Hesselson	Schuylkill
Ingrid Fisher	Berks
Alyssa Dourte, foster parent	
Michelle Filling-Brown, PhD	
Virginia Garris Sharp, Legal Counsel and Guardian ad Litem for youth Law Office of Natalie Burston	Venango
Gary L. Rothschild, Esq.	Dauphin
Anne Fisher - Reading School District	Dauphin
Ashley Rinehart, LSW	Berks
Rita C. Murillo	Berks
Karen L Domalakes	Allegheny
Barbara Starkey	Schuylkill
Daniella Fadjoh, Girls Justice League	
Diane E. Hasek, Esq.	Delaware County
Edward J. McIntyre	Venango
Karen Sehman	Venango
Laura Doran, Adelphoi	Venango
Sheri L Roth, Community Services for Children - ELRC - Region 13	Westmoreland
Dr. Stephanie Scordia, Associate Professor, Community College of Philadelphia	Berks
Christine Lysionek, Cabrini University	Philadelphia
Corey Leigh Korinda, Esq.	
Julie Odell, Community College of Philadelphia	Dauphin
Elisa McCool	
Professor Kara R. Finck, Director Penn Law Interdisciplinary Child Advocacy Clinic (University affiliation listed for identification purposes only)	Philadelphia
Chae Sweet	Philadelphia
Girija Nagaswami	Philadelphia
Martha Morgan	Delaware
Naomi E. Goldstein, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, Co-Director of the JD/PhD Program in Law and Psychology, and Director of the Juvenile Justice Research and Reform Lab at Drexel University Philadelphia	Philadelphia
Lucy Johnston-Walsh, Esq. Dickinson Law School	Cumberland
Sarah Byker James, Assistant Professor, Community College of Philadelphia	Philadelphia
Barbara Senst	
Yvonne King, PhD	Montgomery
Eleanor Fitzpatrick	
Lonce Scott, Cradle of Liberty Council, Boy Scouts of America	Delaware
Representative Jennifer O'Mara	
Jennifer Paradis Behle	Delaware

Ellyn C. Sapper, Esq., Senior Attorney, Children's Justice Unit
Emily Blumenstein
Dr. Rosalie Smiley, California University of Pennsylvania

Delaware
Philadelphia
Allegheny

[\[1\]](#) Sponsors of S.B. 324 include Senators Martin, Bartolotta, J. Ward, Fontana, Scavello, Yudichak, Baker, Stefano, Mensch, Santarsiero and Boscola.