

Assembly Bill No. 2342

Passed the Assembly August 19, 2010

Chief Clerk of the Assembly

Passed the Senate August 18, 2010

Secretary of the Senate

This bill was received by the Governor this _____ day
of _____, 2010, at _____ o'clock ____M.

Private Secretary of the Governor

CHAPTER _____

An act to add Section 16523 to the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to foster youth.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2342, Evans. Foster youth: outreach programs.

Existing law provides for child welfare services, which are public social services directed toward, among other purposes, protecting and promoting the welfare of all children, including those in foster care placement.

Existing law requires the Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson to be established in the State Department of Social Services with prescribed powers and duties relating to the management of foster children, including the dissemination of information on the rights of children and youth in foster care and the services provided by the office.

This bill would require the office, in consultation with relevant state departments, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and foster youth stakeholders, to develop a resource guide for emancipating foster youth that outlines available statewide programs and services, and the eligibility standards for those programs and services, as specified. This bill would require the office to incorporate the resource guide into its existing Internet Web site and print publications.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) California has the highest number of foster youth of any state in the nation, with approximately 84,000 youth in foster care and over 4,500 youth emancipating from the system every year.

(b) Foster youth transitioning out of foster care, most often than not, leave the system without any real preparation, family support, or education, to achieve gainful employment. Without a network of support to guide them into a successful adulthood, foster youth

preparing to leave foster care face greater challenges and obstacles to independence.

(c) In the California Youth Connection 2009 Summer Leadership and Policy Conference Report, foster youth reported that they are not prepared for the often daunting transition from foster care to adulthood. Foster youth in foster homes, long-term foster homes, or other out-of-home placements found that when the juvenile dependency court terminates jurisdiction of their case, they are not prepared for the realities of adulthood. According to a report released in 2010 by the Public Policy Institute of California, titled “Foster Care in California Achievements and Challenges,” many children who emancipate lack strong connections to a network of supportive adults. For instance, 64 percent of children who emancipated in 2008 and 2009 lived last with someone who was neither a relative or a guardian. Only one in five (21 percent) was last placed with a relative at the exit time of from the foster system. An additional 16 percent were placed with a guardian not related to them.

(d) According to the studies of California’s former foster youth, within 18 months of emancipation, 40 to 50 percent become homeless, 65 percent need immediate housing; 46 percent complete high school, compared to 84 percent of the general population, 50 percent experience high rates of unemployment within five years of emancipation, 33 percent have incomes at, or below, \$6,000 per year, which is substantially below the federal poverty level of \$7,890 for a single individual and 33 percent have no form of health insurance. Moreover youth transitioning from foster care have disproportionately high rates of physical, developmental, and mental health problems, and foster youth with multiple placements are five to 10 times more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system than youth in the general population.

(e) When transitioning from foster care into independent living, most foster youth are unaware of the programs and services available to them in their own community and do not know where to find help or whom to ask for help.

(f) In “A Summary of Foster Youth Recommendations from California Youth Connection Conferences,” a report released in 2006, foster youth reported that emancipation services are not plentiful and often unheard of by youth in foster care, partly

because they do not exist in many counties. Many youth are unaware of any services offered to emancipated youth.

(g) There are many local, state, public, and nonprofit organizations in California that have developed their own version of a resource guide for foster youth, however, these resource guides usually include information specific to a local government, county, or organization, or are not developed specifically to include information on programs and services for foster youth.

(h) Developing and distributing a resource guide that includes information on available statewide programs and services will provide emancipating foster youth with a valuable tool that they can use to navigate a complex, and sometimes intimidating, system of public agencies and organizations.

(i) Connecting transitioning youth with information on existing programs and services available to them will increase their opportunities for experiencing a successful transition into independence.

SEC. 2. Section 16523 is added to the Welfare and Institutions Code, to read:

16523. (a) The Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson shall develop a resource guide for emancipating foster youth that outlines available statewide programs and services, and the eligibility standards for those programs and services. The programs and services included in the resource guide shall include, but not be limited to, those associated with education, including preparing for and assessing postsecondary or vocation education and financial aid, health and health care coverage, housing assistance and transitional living programs, mental health services, independent living programs, accessing and obtaining personal identification documents, personal finance, career planning, and job training opportunities.

(b) The office shall incorporate the resource guide into its existing Internet Web site and print publications.

(c) The office shall consult with relevant state departments, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and foster youth stakeholders, including, but not limited to, California Youth Connection, to develop the resource guide.

Approved _____, 2010

Governor