

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Opinion: Landmark legislation benefits foster youth

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Needless to say, it is no surprise that foster youth have much lower educational achievement and are highly likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, mental illness, unplanned pregnancies, involvement with the legal system, and continue to consume public resources. AB 12 will help dramatically improve these outcomes.

In 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Federal Public Law 110-351), which provided California the opportunity to access federal funding to serve foster youth up to age 21. AB 12 is California's implementation of this federal legislation which is cost-neutral to the state, allowing the expansion of services to foster youth ages 18-21, offset by increased federal support.

And there is even more good news. National research conducted last year by two major universities, substantiated that every dollar expended on former foster youth ages 18-21 will produce a \$2.41 return to the public coffers. Instead of being public resource consumers, these former foster youth become public resource contributors.

The passage of AB 12 was no small feat. This legislation took more than two years and required several last-minute amendments to appease the Department of Finance. Sam Blakeslee, in his new role as state senator, courageously broke ranks with his caucus and voted for AB 12. The bill passed in the Senate 26-8, and in the Assembly 73-2, demonstrating the bill's excellent bipartisan support. But, there is still work to be done to make AB 12 public law.

We began this year faced with the governor's draconian proposal to dismantle services to former foster youth. Fortunately, there was an extraordinary chorus of opposition which effectively silenced that idea. Now, the governor has the opportunity to make historical improvements in the lives of California's foster youth by signing this landmark legislation.

In deference to Mr. Schwarzenegger, he has been a supporter of important foster care legislation and routinely has verbalized his concern for foster youth throughout his tenure in office. Supporting AB 12 is yet another opportunity for him to turn words into action.

California's foster youth desire the opportunity to make a successful entry into adulthood just as much as any other young adults. Let's help them.

F.Y.I.

If you would like to ask Gov. Schwarzenegger to sign AB 12, you can contact him via mail at: State Capitol Building, Sacramento, CA 95814; via telephone at: 916-445-2841; via FAX at: 916-558-3160; or via e-mail using the link on his website at <http://gov.ca.gov/>

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