

REP. GEORGE MILLER | U.S. CONGRESS

CALIFORNIA'S 7TH DISTRICT

*Senior Democrat, Education & Workforce Committee • Member, Resources Committee
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REP. MILLER INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO HELP FOSTER CARE CHILDREN SUCCEED IN COLLEGE

WASHINGTON - Recognizing the unique challenges that children leaving the foster care system face, Rep. George Miller (D-CA) introduced legislation yesterday to help them access and succeed in college.

“Too many foster care children reach age 18, leave the foster care system, and slip through the cracks,” said Miller, the senior Democrat on the House education committee. “We should provide foster children with better opportunities for success in higher education and better chance for success in life.”

Recent studies by the Center for the Study of Social Policy and the Packard Foundation showed that many of the 20,000 children aging out of foster care each year face greater challenges than other children as they enter the adult world, including a greater likelihood of becoming teen parents; depending on public assistance; participating in substance abuse; going homeless; or winding up in the criminal justice system.

Last month, the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago reported that foster children develop mental health and substance abuse problems at three times the national rate of like-age children.

A report issued by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) found that more than 26 percent of foster children have repeated a grade at least once since the seventh grade; 60 percent have failed a class in the previous year; and over a third were below grade level in written language, math, and reading. Foster care youth have higher absentee and tardy rates, and only 20 percent of them have completed high school or obtained a GED.

Not surprisingly, few foster children who do graduate high school go on to college. A study by Casey Family Programs concluded that fewer than 27 percent of foster children that graduated high school went on to college, compared to 52 percent of high school graduates overall. Moreover, the college dropout rate among foster youth is far higher than the rate among other students.

To address these problems, the Foster Opportunities for Success Through Higher Education Reform Act (H.R. 4003) would prioritize foster care children for existing academic programs that help disadvantaged students with reading, writing, mathematics, study skills and other services aimed at preparing children for higher education.

The bill would also help foster children access financial aid by simplifying the financial aid process, assisting children with filling out financial aid forms, setting up aid packages, and supplying children with extra financial aid to fill the gap left by their lack of family contributions.

Finally, the bill would reward colleges that provide strategies for helping foster students attend and succeed in college, such as special recruitment programs, peer networking, and mentoring. The bill would ensure housing for foster children during college breaks and regular dormitory closings.

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“There’s no question that foster care children are more likely to get left behind than are other children,” said Miller, who has sponsored conferences on unmet needs of foster children, and who authored the 1980 federal foster care and adoption law. “Without families to support them, it’s critical that we all take responsibility for helping foster children to get a chance at a successful future by opening the doors of college and opportunity for them.”

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