



CENTER FOR THE RIGHTS
OF ABUSED CHILDREN

May 5, 2023

The Honorable Chris Holden, Chair
Assembly Committee on Appropriations
1021 O Street, Room 5650
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 1512 (Bryan) Preserving Social Security Administration Benefits for Foster Youth - SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Holden:

On behalf of the Center for the Rights of Abused Children (Center), I write in support of AB 1512 (Bryan). This critical initiative protects and preserves federal benefits that belong to the child by requiring counties to properly screen for eligibility, apply for the benefits on behalf of the child, and direct, spend, and conserve the child's benefits - using them only when necessary to meet the child's current unmet needs and future needs rather than using the funds to pay for the cost of the child's foster care placement.

The Center works to ensure every abused child has a bright future. We do this through two programs that work to inspire change and protect the rights of abused children. First, we work with policymakers in our home state of Arizona and other states nationwide to change laws, policies, and practices. Second, we operate a *pro bono* Children's Law Clinic that provides free legal assistance to children, bio parents, foster parents, and kinship placements across Arizona.

Through our work, we learned that states use children's federal social security benefits to reimburse themselves for their care. One young man shared his personal experience, a compelling anecdote that conveys the need to eliminate this practice.

When he was 11 years old, this young man's mother died, and his father was arrested for a serious crime. He had no relatives to care for him, so he was placed in foster care until he aged out of the system. He said that amid his grief, he was terrified of living with strangers, anxious about survival, and felt utterly alone. He is haunted by trauma to this day.

However, he had one source of hope. His mother served honorably in the U.S. Navy, making him eligible for survivor benefits through the Veterans Administration and Social Security. He hoped those funds would help him through college, secure safe housing, find reliable transportation, and do "normal things" like going on school trips



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and participating in extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, he never saw a dime of those funds.

When he turned 18 and exited foster care, he learned the system that was supposed to be helping him had been stealing from him the whole time. The state's child welfare agency, without his knowledge, applied for his federal benefits, received them for years, and used them to reimburse itself for his time in foster care.

AB 1512 will help protect California youth in foster care who, like this young man, may be eligible for one or more federal benefits programs like Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for individuals with disabilities and Social Security Survivor benefits. For these vulnerable youth in care, access to their benefits could mean the difference between being unhoused and stable housing, between food insecurity or a full refrigerator, and between unemployment or transportation to work and school.

We help push for legislative changes to remedy this injustice. Arizona is one of over a dozen states that have initiated legislation or policy changes. We urge California to be a leader on this issue by passing AB 1512, ensuring that youth in foster care can access those critical federal funds by requiring counties to:

- Screen and apply for SSA benefits for youth in a timely manner upon entering care;
- Notify the youth and others, such as the child's attorney, about the status of their application and benefits;
- Identify and propose caring adults in the youth's life who could serve as the representative payee; and
- Use the child's social security benefits in the best interest of the child for current unmet needs and/or conserve remaining funds in appropriate accounts for the child's future use.

For these reasons, we support AB 1512 (Bryan) and respectfully request your support for the bill. Thank you for your service to the residents of California and for your support of children in foster care.

Sincerely,

Darcy Olsen
CEO