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UTILITIES AND ENERGY
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 2 ON
EDUCATION FINANCE
LEGISLATIVE ETHICS

AB 2222: The Golden State Social Opportunities Program

SUMMARY

This bill establishes the Golden State Social Opportunities Program, a scholarship that will encourage students with lived experiences as former foster and homeless youth to pursue careers as Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW), Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCC), or Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT).

BACKGROUND

The California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) is responsible for administering financial aid programs across California schools. In 2021, the Commission was tasked with administering the Golden State Teacher Grant program, designed to address the state's teacher shortage by providing financial incentives to pursue teaching.

California is currently facing a severe shortage of mental health workers. According to a 2018 report, the projected supply of LMFTs, LPCCs, and LCSWs will be inadequate to meet future demand. Further, the current makeup of the mental health workforce does not reflect California's diversity, with Black and Latino professionals being the most underrepresented groups in the field.

Nonprofits are also struggling to maintain staff in the midst of COVID-19 and the Great Resignation. For nonprofits providing mental health services, it is especially important for their workforce to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

PROBLEM

Students who are pursuing LCSW, LPCC, and LMFT careers must complete extensive fieldwork education while they are still in school. The required hours depend on the school's

accreditation, but can range from 400-800 hours per year.

Many students seeking to become LCSWs, LPCCs, and LMFTs must scale back or forgo their employment in order to meet the demands of school and their fieldwork hours. This precludes students who cannot afford to stop working from pursuing careers in this field, creating barriers to entering the mental health workforce. This especially impacts former foster and homeless youth who seek to serve youth who share their lived experiences, but may lack the financial resources to pursue careers as licensed mental health professionals.

THIS BILL

AB 2222 addresses critical shortages within the mental health workforce by reducing financial barriers for students as they complete their fieldwork to become LCSWs, LPCCs, or LMFTs. Under this program, which is based on the Golden State Teacher Grant, CSAC will administer scholarships of up to \$20,000 annually to students who commit to working for at least two years at a California-based nonprofit upon completion of their graduate school course of study.

By prioritizing former foster and homeless youth for grants, AB 2222 will ensure California's mental health professionals are reflective of the communities they serve. This bill will also improve quality of care for current foster and homeless youth, who will benefit from working with providers who share their lived experiences.

SUPPORT

California Coalition for Youth (Sponsor)
Aspiranet