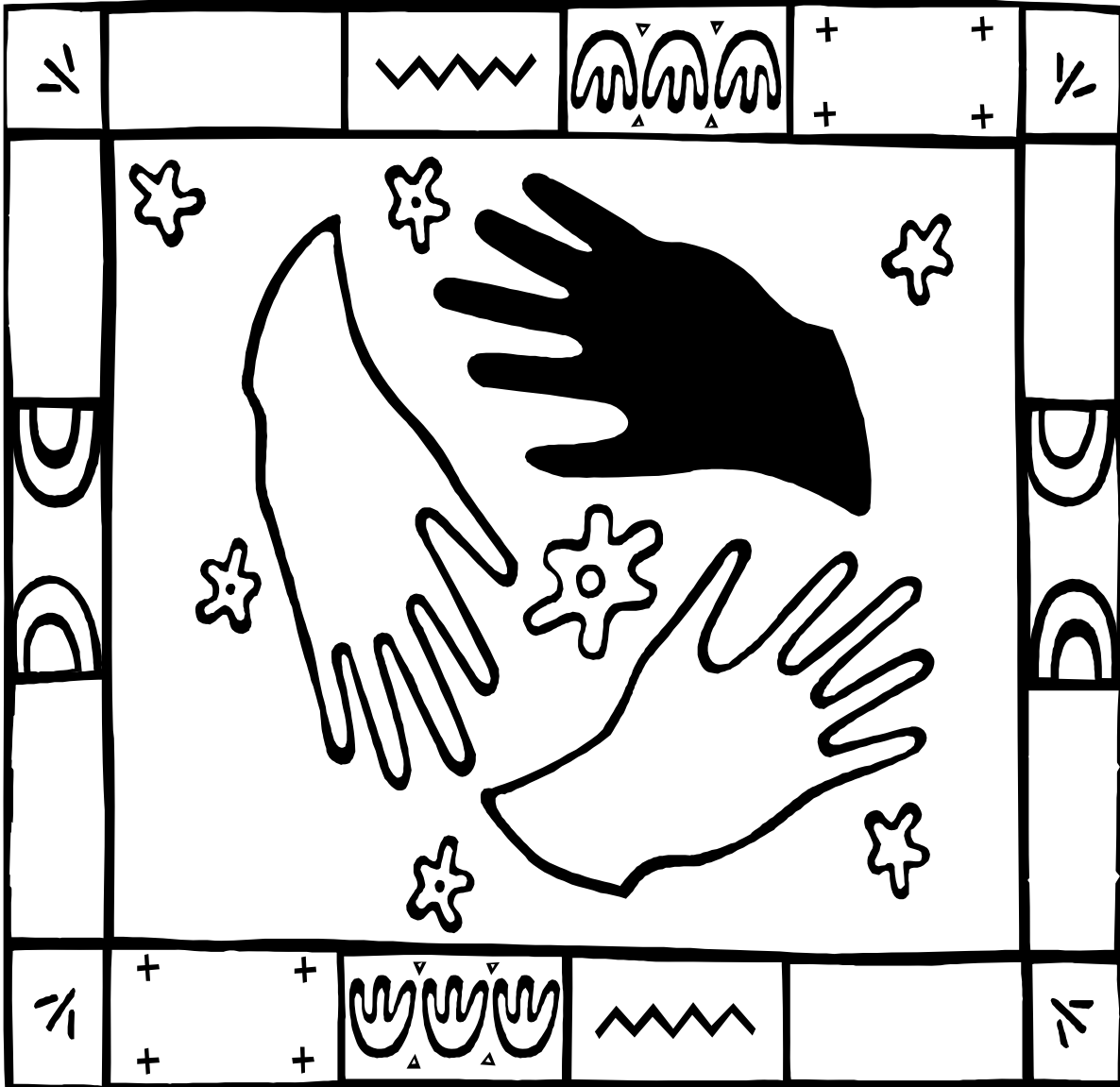


Resource Directory

A Guide for Current and Emancipated Foster Youth



Provided by:
California Department of Social Services
Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman
Toll Free Help Line: (877) 846-1602
www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov



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Foster Youth Have Rights!

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN A SAFE, COMFORTABLE HOME WITH:

- enough clothes and healthy food
- your own place to store your things
- an allowance (if you are in a group home)
- a telephone you can use to make confidential calls (unless a judge says you cannot)

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- be treated with respect
- go to religious services and activities of your choice
- send and receive unopened mail (unless a judge says someone else can open your mail)
- contact people who are not in the foster care system (like friends, church members, teachers and others)
- make contact with social workers, attorneys, probation officers, CASAs, foster youth advocates, supporters or anyone else involved with your case
- be told about your placement by your social worker or probation officer

NO ONE CAN:

- lock you in a room or building (unless you are in a community treatment facility)
- abuse you physically, sexually or emotionally for any reason

- punish you by physically hurting you for any reason
- look through your things unless they have a good and legal reason
- harass or discriminate against you because you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or because someone thinks you are.

YOU HAVE RIGHTS AT COURT.

YOU CAN:

- go to court and talk to the judge
- see and get a copy of your court report and your case plan
- keep your court records private, unless the law says otherwise
- be told by your social worker or probation officer and your attorney about any changes in your case plan or placement

YOU HAVE HEALTH RIGHTS.

YOU CAN:

- see a doctor, dentist, eye doctor or talk with a counselor if you need to
- refuse to take medicines, vitamins or herbs (unless a doctor or a judge says you must)

YOU HAVE FAMILY RIGHTS.

YOU CAN:

- visit and contact your siblings (unless a judge says you cannot)
- contact parents and other family members, too (unless a judge says you cannot)

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO SOME THINGS ON YOUR OWN. YOU CAN:

- have your own emancipation bank account (unless your case plan says you cannot)
- learn job skills right for your age
- work, unless the law says you are too young to manage the money you earn (if right for your age, development level and it is in your case plan)
- go to Independent Living Program classes and activities if you are old enough

YOU HAVE SCHOOL RIGHTS.

YOU CAN:

- go to school everyday
- go to after-school activities right for your age and development level

YOU HAVE OTHER RIGHTS.

YOU CAN:

- tell the judge how you feel about your family, lawyer and social worker
- tell the judge what you want to happen in your case
- have your own lawyer
- live with a family member if that would be a safe place
- call the Foster Care Ombudsman Office and Community Care Licensing at any time
- get help with school, if you need it

Remember your rights.

Also remember that the foster parent's or group home's job is to supervise you and keep you safe and healthy.

Rights, Rights & More Rights!

Know your rights!

**For a complete list of foster youth rights, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman
1-877-846-1602**

Connection with a Caring Adult

- You have the right to identify and maintain relationships with appropriate individuals who are important to you, as long as it's in your best interest. The intent of current law is that no child shall leave foster care without a permanent caring relationship with an adult.
- Social workers must ask children aged 10 and older, placed in group homes, and who have been in the foster care system for six months or longer about relationships they have that are important to them.

Participate in Social Activities

- You have the right to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities such as school-sponsored field trips or sports, trips to the mall, sleep-over with friends, scouting, and 4-H without requiring criminal background checks of chaperones/friends and friend's parents/supervisors. Caregivers (foster parents, approved relative caregivers, or approved non-relative extended family members), using a prudent parent standard, must determine beforehand that there are no reasonably foreseeable risk that you may be harmed before you will be allowed to participate in any events. Welfare and Institutions Codes Section 362.05

If you feel you are being discriminated against because of, but not limited to, your sex, race, color, religion, your sexual orientation, or for any other reason, please contact the Foster Care Ombudsman Help-line.

Rights reference: Welfare & Institutions Code Sections 27, 16001.9, 16160, 16501.1, Health and Safety Code Section 1530.91, California Code of Regulations Title 22, Div 6, Chap 5, Art 6 - Subchapter 1, Art 4 - Section 84072, CDSS Manual of Policies and Procedures Section 31-401.5 and 31-445.142

Foster Youth Education Rights

INTRODUCTION - AB 490

Effective January 1, 2004, Assembly Bill 490 (Steinberg) imposes new duties and rights related to the education of dependents and wards in foster care.

Guiding Principles: *Everyone shares the duty to promote the educational progress of children in out of home placements.*

Educators, school personnel, social workers, probation officers, caregivers, advocates and juvenile court officers must all work together to serve the educational needs of children in foster care.

Foster youth must have access to the same academic resources, services, extracurricular and enrichment activities available to all students.
EC 48850(a)

SCHOOL STABILITY

Role of the County Placing Agency

When making out of home placements, the placing agency must consider both the placement's proximity to the child's present school *and* the impact the placement will have on the child's educational stability. WIC 16501.1(c)

Role of the School

- Educational placements of foster youth must be made to ensure that youth have access to the same resources available to all students, that the educational placement is the least restrictive environment, and that the educational placement is in the youth's best interest. WIC 361, 726, EC 48853

- **Right to remain in school of origin:**

If the child's residential placement changes, the school district must allow the child to remain in her school of origin for the duration of the school year, provided it is in her best interest to do so. The child's best interest is determined by the school district foster care liaison, the person who holds education rights, and the child. If a dispute arises, the child has the right to remain in her school of origin until the dispute is resolved. EC 48853.5

School District Foster Care Liaison

Every school district and County Office of Education must have an educational liaison for foster children. The duties of a liaison are:

- To ensure proper school placement, enrollment and checkout from school
- To assist with the transfer of grades, credits and records when youth transfer schools
- To complete school record transfers within 2 business days. EC 48853.5

Preference for Public School

Foster children must attend programs operated by the local education agency unless the child has an IEP requiring a different educational placement, or the person with education rights determines that it is in the child's best interest to attend a different educational program or to remain in the school of origin. EC 48853

Immediate Enrollment

The child has the right to be immediately enrolled in the new school without school records, immunization records, uniforms, etc. EC 48853.5(d) (4) (b)

Timely Transfer of Records

The timely transfer of records is the responsibility of both the placing agency and the school district. EC 49069.5

County Placing Agency Worker

When the case worker or probation officer becomes aware of the need to transfer a student to a new school, he or she must:

- Notify the school of the student's last expected day of attendance
- Request the calculation of the student's educational information
- Request the student is transferred out. EC 49069.5

Case workers and probation officers may access the child's school records without parental consent or court order so that they may assist with school transfer or enrollment, compile the child's health and education summary, or fulfill educational case management duties. EC 49076

Old School

Within 2 business days, the old school must transfer the student out, and deliver the student's educational record to the next school. The record must include a determination of seat time, full or partial credits earned, classes, grades, immunizations and, if applicable, special education or § 504 plans. EC 49069.5

New School

The liaison for the new school shall, within 2 business days of the foster child's request for enrollment, contact the school last attended by the foster child to obtain all academic and other records. EC 48853.5(d) (4) (c)

Protection for Grades and Credits

A foster child's grades cannot be lowered due to absences caused by a change in placement, attendance at a court hearing, or a court ordered activity. EC 49069.5 Schools must award all students (not just foster youth) with credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed at another public school, a juvenile court school, or a non-public, non-sectarian school. EC 48645.5 The California Foster Youth Education Task Force is a coalition of 21 organizations dedicated to improving educational outcomes for foster youth. For more information, please contact Sarah Vesecky or Leslie Heimov, Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, at 323.980.1700 or Erin Saberi, Casey Family Programs, at 916.646.3646 ext. 3007.

Fact Sheets have incorporated the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (effective July 1, 2005). Fact sheets produced April 2005.

Dealing with the Courts

Go to Your Court Hearings!!!

It is very important that you attend your court hearings. You have the right to be notified of and to go to **ALL** your court hearings and address your wants and needs to the judge and to get copies of all of your court reports. Court hearings are your chance to let the judge know what you need. The judge wants to hear from you and will take what you say seriously. All foster youth need to play an active part in making decisions about their life. Also, make sure you get copies of all of your court reports. You have the right to see your case file, case plan, and court reports if you are 12 or over. Make sure you see your case plan. If it doesn't include everything you need, let your social worker know. It is important that you be your own advocate and speak up for what you need.

Talk to Your Lawyer!

Make sure you communicate with your lawyer about your needs and wishes. It is your lawyer's job to represent you in court and to convey what you want. If you don't know who your lawyer is, or have a problem contacting them, contact the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman and we can help you.

Talk to Your Social Worker or Probation Officer!

Most youth in Foster Care have an attorney. Make sure to communicate your needs and wishes to your social worker or Probation Officer because they make reports to the court and make important decisions about where you live, who you live with, and your visits.

Seal Your Records!

When you turn 18, you have the right to go to court and ask that your case file be sealed. This is important, because if you don't seal your records, they will remain open for years.

Get a CASA!

A person that can help you with the court process is the Court Appointed Special Advocate, or CASA. The CASA spends time to get to know you and finds out what you need and want. The CASA will go to court with or for you and makes sure the judge and others who are working on your case know your needs and your perspective. Having another adult who is YOUR advocate is always valuable. <http://www.californiacasa.org/>

To locate a CASA, or for more information about court, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at 1-877-846-1602.

Education: High School

Get Your High School Education!

Need more time to graduate high school?

Your social worker can extend your foster care payments so you can stay in your foster or group home until you turn 19 or graduate.

How do I benefit from getting good grades in high school?

If you get good grades in high school, you will be eligible to attend a four-year university, and you will be eligible to get scholarships that will help you pay for college and housing while you attend college.

What if my grades aren't so great or I won't graduate from high school—can I still go to college?

Yes, you have many options! You can attend a community college, even if you have a very low GPA or you did not graduate from high school. You can transfer from a community college to a four-year university and you will still be eligible for scholarships and help with living expenses.

Get Help If You Need It!

If you need help with school, then ask — there are people who can help you! Many ILP programs provide tutoring or help with school and there are other programs that offer foster youth help, such as...

Foster Youth Services

Some counties have a program called Foster Youth Services, which helps foster youth in group homes with tutoring, getting school records, and other education-related services. If your county doesn't have a Foster Youth Services program and you would like one, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman and we can help you.

To locate a Foster Youth Services program or a tutoring program, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at 1-877-846-1602

Education: College

Your Best Investment!

A college education will help you earn more money, get better jobs, get respect from others, have financial and career security, gain new knowledge, and secure your future.

California Community Colleges

(No grade requirement/No cost to foster youth)

Even if your grades were bad, you did not graduate from high school or you received your GED, you still can go to a community college and transfer to a university. Community Colleges provide financial aid and other support that makes it possible for foster youth and emancipated youth to attend college, almost free of charge. You can earn your Associate Degree or a certificate in less than two years of full time classes. Community college vocational training programs include nursing, computer programming, mechanics and electronics. For more information, call the Community College Foundation Independent Living Program at **1-800-400-5881** or **<http://www.cccco.edu/>**

Four Year Colleges

California public four year colleges include both California State Universities (CSU) and Universities of California (UC). All of the public four-year universities have dorms where students can live and eat on the school campus. Financial aid programs can help pay for tuition, room and board, and expenses.

Guardian Scholars

CSU Fullerton has a program for former foster youth called the **Guardian Scholars Program** which accepts a certain number of foster youth every year into the college and provides a full scholarship, peer support, tutoring, and academic support. If you would like more information, contact the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman or see the Fullerton website: <http://www.fullerton.edu/guardianscholars/>

Financial Aid Information

Foster youth are eligible for many types of financial aid. There are state financial aid programs, federal financial aid programs, college and university financial aid programs, and scholarships from different sources.

Foster youth are also eligible for:

- **Federal Pell Grants:** Federal grants of money for low-income students that do not need to be paid back.
- **Cal Grants A, B, C, and T:** State grants of money for low-income students that do not need to be paid back.
- **EOPS and EOP:** Financial aid programs at community colleges and public four year universities that provide grants and stipends that do not need to be paid back.
- **Federal loans:** Money that must be paid back after students graduate from college.
- **Fee waivers:** Community College programs that waive the cost of classes for low-income students.
- **Scholarships:** Grants of money from different sources that youth must find and apply for that doesn't need to be paid back.
Visit <http://www.csac.ca.gov/> for more information

Scholarships specifically for foster youth:

The California Chafee Grant (See the next page to learn all about it)

The Orphan Foundation of America Scholarships for Youth in Foster Care

The Orphan Foundation of America is committed to helping parentless teens make the difficult transition from foster care into independent adulthood. As part of its mission, the foundation awards scholarships ranging between \$1,500 and \$10,000 a year to students pursuing two- or four-year degrees, or a vocational training certificate. Applicants to the OFA/Casey Family Scholars program must have been in foster care or a ward of the court for at least one year (twelve months) on their 18th birthday; be under the age of 25 on April 1, 2004; and be enrolled in or have applied to college or a vocational training program. See the Orphan Foundation website for complete program guidelines and application procedures. RFP Link: <http://www.orphan.org/>

**For more information about how foster youth can attend
community colleges and four year colleges,
call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at
1-877-846-1602**

Free Money for Vocational Training or College for Current or Former Foster Youth

What is a California Chafee Grant?

The California Chafee Grant Program gives free money to **current or former foster youth** to use for vocational school training *or* college courses.

What do I need to apply?

You must be enrolled in:

- an eligible vocational school or college
- a course of study at least half-time
- a course of study that is at least one year long

And you must maintain satisfactory academic progress.

To apply, you must: be eligible, or have been eligible for foster care, between your 16th and 18th birthday, **not** have reached your 22nd birthday as of July 1, 2005, *and* file two forms:

1. *2005-06 Free Application for Federal Student Aid*, or FAFSA. File online at www.fafsa.ed.gov or get a paper form from your school. Students without a Social Security number or who are unable to complete a FAFSA must have their school contact the California Student Aid Commission (Commission) for further instructions and assistance.
2. *California Chafee Grant Program Application*. Apply online or send the paper form to the Commission. The online and downloadable forms are available at our website at www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov or through the Student Aid Commission.

How will I know if I'm selected?

The Student Aid Commission will review your FAFSA and your Chafee Grant Application, then the California Department of Social Services will verify your Independent Living Program (ILP) status and your school financial aid office will determine your financial aid eligibility. Once all of the above is completed, the Student Aid Commission will send you a letter notifying you of your award status.

How will I get the grant?

Your grant will be sent to the vocational school or college where you are enrolled. Talk to your school's financial aid advisor about how the school will disburse the grant.

Will the award affect my other school aid?

Yes, receipt of this award **may** affect other financial aid you may be receiving, so be sure to check with your school's financial aid office.

What kinds of institutes or colleges can I attend in California?

You can attend participating campuses of the:

University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges, independent college, private colleges **or** vocational school.

Can I attend a vocational school or college outside California?

Yes, you can attend a qualifying vocational school or college outside of California. Your vocational school or college and program of study must meet certain criteria. (See "What do I need to apply?") If you have a question regarding a college, contact the Specialized Programs Operations Branch staff of the Commission.

Could I lose California Chafee Grant benefits?

Yes, if your enrollment in a vocational institute or college falls below half-time in the term(s) awarded, or if you fail to maintain satisfactory academic progress.

How do I renew my Chafee Grant?

It's easy! All you need to do is complete the 2005-06 FAFSA. Renewal students do not need to submit another 2005-06 Chafee Grant application. (Students without a Social Security number, or who are unable to complete a FAFSA, must have their school contact the Commission for further instructions.) It is important to report any name, address or school changes to the Commission as soon as possible to avoid any delay in the award process. The Commission will contact the Financial Aid Office of your vocational school or college to verify you are enrolled at least halftime, you are maintaining satisfactory academic progress and you have financial aid need.

Can others help me learn about Chafee Grants for current or former foster youth?

Yes, you can contact your social worker/probation officer, county/college ILP Coordinator, school financial aid administrator/school counselor, One-Stop Career Centers, or at: www.chafee.csac.ca.gov

How can I contact the Student Aid Commission?

If you have questions regarding the California Chafee Grant Program,

You can contact the California Student Aid Commission at:

California Student Aid Commission - Specialized Programs
Attn: California Chafee Grant Program
P. O. Box 419029
Rancho Cordova, CA 95741-9029

You can call the Commission at: 1-888-224-7268 Hours are from 8:00 a.m. until 4:55 p.m. Monday through Friday.

You can e-mail your questions to the Commission at: specialized@csac.ca.gov

You can review general California Chafee Grant information at: www.chafee.csac.ca.gov

Make sure you contact the Commission whenever there are changes in your:

Mailing address
School of attendance
Enrollment status
Name
Social Security Number (SSN)
Telephone number

Show Me the Money!

There is money available for both foster youth and former foster youth to help with education, housing, medical, transportation, and recreation expenses. Take advantage of the services offered!

Some possible sources of money....

- Emancipation stipends: counties have money for 18-21 year old emancipated foster youth for housing, education and living expenses. Ask your county's ILP coordinator.
- ILP programs: counties provide money to youth who participate in the program as an incentive. Also, many programs have scholarships, grants, and funds for driver's training, computers, and recreational activities.
- College Financial Aid: Foster youth are considered "independent" students. Therefore, they are eligible for maximum state and federal grants. Financial aid not only pays for tuition costs, but also helps pay for rent and living expenses.
- Welfare to Work: Former foster youth aged 18-25 are eligible for Welfare to Work funding for employment training, placement and services. **Where to Get Help:** *Contact the local county welfare department listed under the County Government section of the telephone book to find the nearest welfare to work office.*
- Emancipation housing: Counties can use up to 30% of their ILP funds for housing for emancipated youth.

**For more information on any of these opportunities for current and former foster youth, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at:
1-877-846-1602**

Independence & ILP

Are you between 16 and 21 years old?

There is a program called the "Independent Living Program" (ILP) available in all California counties, which serves youth aged 16-18 in foster care and also helps emancipated foster youth up to age 21.

What can ILP do for me?

Unless you are prepared, emancipating can be frightening. Among other things, the ILP program can help you to:

- Get money through the Emancipated Youth Stipend to help with housing, food and expenses after you emancipate
- Get funds for driver's training
- Find a steady job, with a good paycheck
- Get an apartment / Transitional Housing
- Learn the skills to become self-sufficient
- Get money to finish school

Participate in ILP!

Make sure you participate in the Independent Living Program, and take advantage of all the services such as the Transitional Housing Placement Program. Read more about this program in the section entitled "Housing".

Independent Living Program

Foster parents or facility personnel are never allowed to prohibit attendance in Independent Living Program (ILP) classes as a form of discipline. Attendance at ILP is a right, rather than a privilege of youth in foster care as they prepare for emancipation.

Your Social worker/Probation officer must:

- Make sure that transportation to ILP is provided and/or accessible.
- Make sure you have access to ILP core services (ILP participation cannot be used as a punishment or a reward)
- The county where you live must provide core ILP services.
- The county where your court is must pay the county where you live for the ILP services they provide.
- **Make sure that you are able to complete the goals in your Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP).** Your ILP coordinator will help you achieve those goals.

Don't know what a TILP is? It's your emancipation preparation plan! You write your first plan with your social worker when you are 15 to 16 years old. You update it every six months! Ask your social worker/probation officer/ or ILP coordinator!!!

**To hook up with the Independent Living Program, or to voice a concern about the way things are going for you, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at
1-877-846-1602**

Employment

One-Stop Centers help you find a job!

There are many services available to help current and former foster youth find a job or enroll in a job-training program. Current and former foster youth aged 14-21 can receive many services at the California One-Stop Career Centers in their community.

- Tutoring and study skills
- Help with GED and other high school alternatives
- Summer employment
- Paid and unpaid work experience- internships and job shadowing
- Occupational skills training
- Leadership development opportunities
- Supportive services
- Mentoring
- Guidance and counseling including drug and alcohol abuse.

For more information on One-Stop Centers see: <http://go.fast.to/one-stop>

Other Job Resources

There are many Web sites that list available entry-level jobs in your area. Try these to start:

Information on entry-level employment jobs for youth aged 16-24:

www.entry-level.net

California Employment Development Department jobs: www.edd.cahwnet.gov

Job Search Guide by California region: www.jobsmart.org

Other Programs

Job Corps

Job Corps is a program for 16-24 year olds that provides a place to live, medical care, vocational training, and a GED. Students live on the Job Corps campus while they receive vocational training for a job. This program is free. For more information about Job Corps, call 1-800-733-JOBS. You can also visit the Job Corps web-site at: www.jobcorps.org.

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps provides a living allowance, health insurance, training, and a \$4,275 education award to help pay for college for vocational training for serving full-time in community service. Young people can live on campus or on their own. For more information, visit the AmeriCorps web-site at: www.cns.gov/ameriCorps/joining/.

Conservation Corps

The California Conservation Corps is a residential program for 18-23 year olds that has a motto of "hard work, low pay, miserable conditions... and more!" Members of the Conservation Corps live on a campus and are paid to do day to day conservation work and provide emergency response to floods, fires, oil spills, and earthquakes. For more information call: 1-800-952-JOBS or visit the website at www.ccc.ca.gov/

Youth Employment Opportunity Program (YEOP)

The Youth Employment Opportunity Program (YEOP) is intended to provide services to youth ages 15 through 21 to assist them in achieving their educational and vocational goals. They provide:

- Peer Advising and mentoring
- Referrals to supportive services
- Job referral and placement assistance
- YEOP workshops
- Referrals to training

Contact your local Employment Development Department (EDD) job service site (listed under Employment Development Department or www.edd.ca.gov).

**For more information on any of these opportunities
for current and former foster youth, call the
Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at:
1-877-846-1602**

Housing

Live in your own apartment while in foster care...

Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP) for youth in placement

In some counties, the Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP) offers foster youth the opportunity to have an apartment while still in foster care. The Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP) is a licensed placement opportunity for youth in foster care. The goal of THPP is to help participants emancipate successfully by providing a safe environment for youth to practice the skills learned in the Independent Living Program (ILP). Participants may live alone, with departmental approval, or with roommates in apartments and single family dwellings with regular support and supervision provided by THPP staff, county social workers, and ILP coordinators. Supportive services include regular visits to participants' residence, educational guidance, employment counseling, and assistance reaching emancipation goals outlined in participants' Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP).

To apply you must be:

- a foster youth, 17-19 years old, in an out-of-home placement;
- under the supervision of a social worker or probation officer; and
- actively participating in an ILP (Independent Living Program).

If you qualify, you can live alone or with a roommate—with supervision by a caseworker, ILP Coordinator and your foster care agency. The idea is to prepare youth for emancipation; you learn the skills you need to live on your own.

Housing Assistance After You Emancipate

Resources Are Available!

Emancipating from foster care can be both exciting and frightening. This year, more money is available to help emancipating youth to get started on their own.

- Some counties have Transitional Housing Programs (THP+) for former foster youth 18 – 21 years old and older. For more information contact your former ILP Coordinator or the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at 1-877-846-1602.
- Your county ILP program has money to spend on 18-21 year old former foster youth to help with housing, college or vocational training costs, transportation, and other needs. The Governor allocated \$3.5 million dollars to stipends for emancipating youth.
- Counties can now use up to 30 percent of their increased ILP funds for housing for emancipated foster youth.

Emergency Shelters

Emergency shelters can provide a temporary place to help you get back on your feet and provide a place to live temporarily. Call the county social services number, your ILP Coordinator, or the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman to locate a shelter in your area.

To locate housing programs for emancipated youth, a shelter or other resources call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at 1-877-846-1602

Health

Medi-Cal Coverage Until 21 Years for Foster Youth

All foster youth are eligible for Medi-Cal. Youth have the right to receive needed medical and dental care while in foster care and after they emancipate (see All County Information Notice No. I-117-00). Through the Extended Medi-Cal Program for Emancipated Foster Youth young people whose dependency terminated at 18 or later can continue to receive Medi-Cal until their 21st birthday. It is important to take care of yourself and stay healthy, and there are services that can help you do that. If you are going to emancipate from foster care or you have already emancipated from foster care contact your Independent Living Coordinator or your social worker to sign-up for the Extended Medi-Cal Program for Emancipated Foster Youth.

Medi-Cal Hot-Line

If you have questions about Medi-Cal eligibility and medical and dental bills you can contact the Medi-Cal Hotline at: 916-636-1980

Teenage Health Resource Line

The Teenage Health Resource Line is a toll-free number where nurses answer confidential health questions. The hours are 7a.m. to 11p.m. 7 days a week. The number is 1-888-711-TEEN. Health questions can also be e-mailed to teenhealth@lpch.stanford.edu.

Public Health Nurses

The Health Care Program for children in foster care was created to improve healthcare needs of foster children and youth. In this program, county public health nurses work with children's caseworkers to coordinate services needed by foster youth to resolve physical, mental, dental and developmental problems.

<http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/hcpcf/Pages/default.aspx>

If you need help with a health related issue, or want more information about keeping your Medi-Cal until 21, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at 1-877-846-1602.

Mental Health Services

The **Therapeutic Behavioral Services** (TBS) is a service for children and youth with serious emotional problems who are experiencing stressful transitions or life crises and need additional short-term support to prevent an out-of-home placement or transfer from an out-of-home placement to a higher level placement. TBS may also enable a transition from one level of out-of-home placement to a lower level placement. For children or youth being placed out of home or transferring from one placement to a higher level placement, the child's County Mental Health Plan must consider whether the provision of TBS will allow the child to remain in his or her current living situation.

To initiate TBS Services, a Mental Health Plan must be initiated. (The phrase "Mental Health Plan" refers to a county mental health agency). Generally, the child's social worker refers a child to the County Mental Health Plan Agency. However, a foster parent, group home, relative or the Foster Care Ombudsman office can also make a referral on behalf of a foster child to a Mental Health agency. The Mental Health agency then performs an intake and a staff member is responsible for making appropriate referrals such as for a psychiatric evaluation, counseling, and other mental health services. Once a Mental Health Plan has been established for a foster youth, TBS services can be implemented.

Complaint Process for Lack of Mental Health Services

A complaint can be made if there is reason to believe that insufficient Mental Health services are being provided to a foster child. The process is as follows:

1. Contact a local Mental Health facility and request a complaint form. Contact Mental Health Ombudsman at 1-800-896-4042.
2. If you have questions or concerns, Mental Health agencies work with patients' rights advocates who are not associated with the agency. These advocates can either assist you with information or make a referral to the statewide patient advocate, called Protection and Advocacy, Inc. The Sacramento office is located at 100 Howe Ave. The phone number is 916-575-1610; the Hotline number is 1-800-254-5166.

If you need help with a mental health issue or want more information call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at 1-877-846-1602.

Youth Crisis Lines and Help Lines

The Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman can help you with most issues, but if you need help right away when the toll-free phone line is not available, these 24 hour lines may help.

California Youth Crisis Line (1-800-843-5200)

Provides 24-hour counseling service, information and referrals for all areas of California regarding medical services, shelters, crisis centers, AIDS testing, and transportation info.

NINELINE (1-800-999-9999)

Provides 24-hour information, referrals and assistance to any youth in crisis.

National Runaway Switchboard (1-800-621-4000)

Provides 24-hour assistance, information, and referrals to youth who have run away or other youth in crisis.

Drivers License Information

Foster youth, both dependents and wards, may apply for a driver's license if the application is signed by:

- a grandparent,
- a sibling over the age of 18, an aunt,
- an uncle,
- or a foster parent with whom the minor resides,
- a probation officer or
- child protective services worker

Filing for proof of financial responsibility

Once a youth has a driver's license, his or her parents or guardian are responsible for any damages resulting from any accident or injury caused by the youth while driving a motor vehicle. The same is true for any person (including a foster parent) who signs a driver's license application on behalf of a youth. Only state and county probation officers and child protective services workers are specifically exempted from the joint liability provisions of VC Sections 17707 and 17708.

Therefore, probation officers and child protective services workers may sign driver's license applications on behalf of foster youth irrespective of the joint liability provisions if the foster youth file proof of financial responsibility. (ACL No. 01-30) (Vehicle Code (VC) Section 17701, 17707 and 17708)

Mentors

Mentor programs pair a caring adult with a foster youth. Mentors can be an adult to talk to, someone to go places with, a support system, and a stable presence in your life. Visit the Governor's Mentoring Partnership website at: <http://www.mentoring.ca.gov/>

The Americorps Foster Youth Mentoring Program is a program through the community colleges that pairs college students with foster youth.
(sac.edu/students/support_services/student_handbook/americorps.htm)

The Big Brothers and Big Sisters are caring adults who are mentors to children. Men and women from all backgrounds help guide their Little Brothers and Little Sisters toward bright futures by sharing life experiences. "Bigs" and "Littles" enjoy schoolwork, sports, recreational activities, movies, museums, and just talking together.
(<http://www.bbbsa.org>)

**If you would like to find a mentor, call the
Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at
1-877-846-1602**

Does Your Care-Provider Need a Community Care Licensing Waiver or Exception?

When a licensee (a foster parent or group home) feels that a youth is capable of engaging in activities that will assist the youth in learning skills in self-sufficiency, the licensee should request an exemption or waiver. The following information will assist licensee in requesting an exception or waiver from Community Care Licensing (CCL).

A **waiver** is a request to waive a particular regulation on a facility-wide basis. It is not tied to a specific individual and may remain in effect regardless of changes in clients and staff.

An **exception** is a request to make an exception to the regulations for a specific client or staff based on the unique needs or circumstances of that individual. The regulation in question will still apply to all other clients and staff in the home or facility.

CCL does not have strict rules regarding the type or amount of substantiation required to support waiver or exception requests. However, as a general rule, it is always a good idea to submit as much as possible. For example, reports from placement workers, therapists, school counselors, doctors or nurses or others involved with the youth which support the request would assist CCL in determining whether to grant the request.

The process to apply for a waiver or an exception from CCL is as follows:

1. The licensee needs to document the youth's capabilities. (For example, that the youth is capable of being home alone for a specific amount of time such as 2 p.m.-6 p.m. to do his/her homework.) This documentation should clarify that it is needed to assist the youth to learn self-sufficiency. Stating that this is necessary for the convenience of the foster parent would not substantiate the request.
2. The licensee must discuss with and request the youth's county placement worker to amend the youth's Case Plan and/or Needs and Services Plan in an effort to strengthen the youth's capacity toward independence and emancipation. The Case Plan and Needs and Services Plan should always incorporate the youth's input and be approved by the youth's authorized representative.

3. The licensee must contact Community Care Licensing in writing to request a waiver or an exception in the event that the youth's county placement worker cannot amend the Case Plan and/or Needs and Services Plan to allow specific modifications due to policies and regulations. The request must include a support letter from the youth's placement worker, and substantiating evidence supporting the request. Whenever the youth is sharing a room or home with another foster youth, a support letter from another foster youth's placement worker may be required.
4. CCL may conduct a visit to the home or facility, interview the youth, and consult with the youth's placement worker or other professionals in the process to determine the appropriateness of a waiver or exception. CCL will advise the licensee in writing whether the request has been approved or denied.

These are several examples of issues for which a waiver or exception might be sought and the possible wording of the youth's capabilities that would support the request:

- Regulation Section 87064 (a) (2) requires the licensee, who is absent from the home while children or youth are present, to provide for supervision of the children or youth by a responsible adult unless otherwise agreed to in advance by the licensing and placing agencies.

"(Youth's Name) has a stable part-time job and an excellent school attendance record, is capable of being present in the home without adult supervision."

- Regulation Section 87075 (l) & (m) (1) requires that medications be kept in a safe and locked place when the physical arrangements and the conditions or the habits of persons in the home or facility will be determined by the licensee or the licensing agency or the physician to be a safety hazard.

"(Youth's Name) is capable of taking and storing his/her own medications in accordance with his/her physician's instruction and is also capable of ensuring that other children in the facility will not have access to the medication." Explain why it is necessary for the youth to have access to these medications and how having this access benefits the youth. For example, that this is part of the youth's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and is needed for skills development.

- Regulation Section 87087.4 (a) requires items such as cleaning solutions, disinfectants, etc. to be stored where they are inaccessible to children.

"(Youth's Name) is capable and responsible enough to have access to these items and is capable of ensuring that other children in the facility will not have access to the cleaning supplies." (List items) Explain why it is necessary for the youth to have access to these cleaning supplies and how having this access benefits the youth. For example, that this is part of the youth's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and is needed for skills development.

- Regulation Section 87064(c) requires the licensee to ensure supervision during the child or youth's participation in or presence at potentially dangerous activities. Subsection (1) requires an adult who can swim to provide supervision at all times when children are using a pool or body of water.

“(Youth's Name) is taking swimming lessons at a local pool where a lifeguard is always on duty.”

“(Youth's Name) is capable of participating in the following extracurricular activities because supervision is provided (i.e. by a coach, a Boy Scout leader, etc.)”

Get Involved!

Get Involved--You are the Expert

Your voice is needed to help make changes to the foster care system. The groups and people who make foster care policies and legislation need to hear from you so that decisions are made that truly reflect the needs of foster youth. There are several ways to get involved so your voice and perspective is heard by decision-makers.

Volunteer with the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman!

Foster youth volunteers are needed to assist the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman make presentations on the Foster Care Ombudsman Program to foster youth groups, group homes, shelters, judges, and other child welfare professionals. Volunteers will also assist staff on a variety of projects while working hours that fit your schedule. Call 1-877-846-1602 to apply, or e-mail fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov.

Join the California Youth Connection!

The California Youth Connection (CYC) is an organization of current and former foster youth. The youth members are between the ages of 14 and 24. Currently there are 22 chapters and over 300 members in California. Foster youth members of CYC are assisting their county and state in making the foster care system better and breaking the stereotypes of foster youth. For more information, call the statewide CYC office at: 1-800-397-8236 or visit their website at www.calyouthconn.org.

The California Youth Connection is an organization that advocates for current and former foster youth ages 14-24 with chapters in many counties throughout California. Go to the chapter meetings in your county. If you don't have a chapter, contact the CYC statewide office at 1-800-397-8236 to find out about starting one. CYC is a great way to find out about the new changes in foster care programs that affect you. By getting involved with CYC, you can develop leadership and public speaking skills while helping make the foster care system better.

Start a Youth Council at your group home!

Licensing regulations state that youth have the right to form a resident's youth council in group homes that will work on making the group home a better place to live for all the residents. The Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman can help you start a Youth Council if you are interested. Call 1-877-846-1602 for more information.

LGBTQ!

THE FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN OFFICE HAS INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND QUESTIONING YOUTH

Selected Organizations:

The National Center for Lesbian Rights

The National Center for Lesbian Rights is a national legal organization committed to advancing the civil and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families through litigation, public policy advocacy, and public education. Call or fax 415.392.6257 x331 (w) | 415.392.8442 (fax) or go to www.nclr.org.

GLBT National Help Center

The GLBT National Help Center provides free and confidential telephone and email peer-counseling, information and local resources for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. The organization also works to strengthen local GLBT hotlines and organizations in their mission of service to the community.

For telephone and email peer counseling on these issues, or go to www.youthtalkline.org or call the toll-free hotline at 1-888-843-4564. To participate in the GLBT National Youth Talkline, click on the Help Center site or call the toll-free hotline at 1-800-246-PRIDE (1-800-246-7743).

Gay-Straight Alliance Network

The goal of the Gay-Straight Alliance Network is to empower youth activists to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools. Call 415-552-4229 or go to www.gsanetwork.org for more information.

General Resources:

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) Best Practice Guidelines: Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care

This easy-to-use resource contains the first-ever set of comprehensive professional guidelines for how child welfare and juvenile justice professionals can best serve LGBT youth in state care. [The Best Practice Guidelines](#) for Serving LGBT Youth in Out of Home Care were developed from recommendations from the Model Standards Project, a collaboration between Legal Services for Children and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR).

Check out: www.nclrights.org/site/docserver/bestpracticeslgbtyouth.pdf.

Breaking the Silence: LGBTQ Foster Youth Tell Their Stories: DVD and Resource CD

The ten short digital stories included on Breaking the Silence are powerful tales of both the successes and failures of the foster care system. Over the course of a four-day workshop organized by National Center for Lesbian Rights and the [Y.O.U.T.H Training Project](#) of San Francisco State's Bay Area Academy which took place at the [Center for Digital Storytelling](#) in Berkeley, California, ten former foster youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) shared their stories and learned to edit them into moving, heartfelt (and sometimes heartbreaking) personal videos. Through these youths' thoughtful, honest, and insightful words and images, we hear directly about their experiences in state care, as well as their recommendations for better supporting LGBTQ youth in the future. In addition, each DVD comes with a CD containing more than 25 useful and informative training tools and resources.

Breaking the Silence is an in-depth tool for social workers, probation officers, group home workers, foster parents, system administrators, lawyers, youth advocates, and other service providers who work with LGBTQ youth. Go to [Breaking the Silence](#) to order a free copy. See www.youthtrainingproject.org and www.nclrights.org for Breaking the Silence.

California-specific information:

Queer & Trans Youth in California Foster Care Have Rights: A Know Your Rights Guide

The National Center for Lesbian Rights, in collaboration with the Out of Home Youth Advocacy Council and California Youth Connection, produced this guide to help queer and transgender youth in the California foster care system navigate their rights. Contact www.nclr.org if you would like to order hard copies.

AB 458 Fact Sheet: The California Foster Care Non-Discrimination Act

AB 458, the Foster Care Non-Discrimination Act, went into effect on January 1, 2004. This law is the first of its kind in the United States to explicitly include protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth and adults involved with the foster care system. See [AB 458](#) to see the exact language of this important legislation. Go to www.nclrights.org for a fact sheet.

LGBTQ Youth in the California Foster Care System: A Question and Answer Guide

This question and answer guide is designed to address many of the frequently-asked questions about protecting LGBTQ youth in the California foster care system from harassment and discrimination. To go www.nclrights.org for Guide for details.

Recursos en español (resources in spanish)

La juventud [LGBTQ en el Sistema](#) de Hogares Sustitutos / LGBTQ Youth in the Foster Care System

Safe Schools Information:

Beyond the Binary - Created by the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Gay-Straight Alliance Network, and the Transgender Law Center, Beyond the Binary is a comprehensive tool kit designed to help students, school staff, and other community activists who want to address harassment and discrimination against transgender and other gender non-conforming students. For a copy go to our website at www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov and click on Beyond.

Study of Anti-Gay Harassment Shows the Problem is Widespread, Dangerous and Preventable

Despite an anti-harassment law that took effect in 2003, harassment and bullying based on sexual orientation remain persistent and pervasive in California schools. More than 200,000 students every year are targets of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, according to a study released by the California Safe Schools Coalition. The Safe Place to Learn study, which included 26 times more respondents than any previous study on the issue, found that such widespread bullying has dangerous academic, health, and safety consequences for students. The study is among the first to document that schools can take concrete steps to reduce harassment and improve student health and safety. Go to www.nclrights.org and click on [Safe Place](#) for more.

AB 537: the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act

AB 537, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000, changed California's Education Code by adding actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity to the existing nondiscrimination policy. The state defines "gender" as "a person's actual

sex or perceived sex and includes a person's perceived identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with a person's sex at birth." AB 537 protects students and school employees against discrimination and harassment at all California public schools and any school receiving state funding except religious schools. The protections cover any program or activity in a school, including extracurricular activities and student clubs. To read more, to go www.gsanetwork.org and click on [Act](#).

Legal Help:

[Gay-straight Alliances: Common Legal Questions and Answers](#)

NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS: Do you have legal questions related to your sexual orientation or gender identity? If so, contact NCLR's legal information helpline by filling out an online form. If you click on the [online form](#) link and fill out the form completely, NCLR staffers will contact you with the information you are looking for. This is the fastest way to get assistance. You may also call the San Francisco National Office of NCLR at 415.392.6257 or toll-free at 1.800.528.6257 and ask for the Legal Helpline.

Other Sources of Help:

Trevor Youth Suicide Helpline (1-866-4UTrevor{488-7386})

A national 24-hour suicide prevention helpline for gay and questioning youth To see what youth activists are doing to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools, check the [Gay Straight Alliance Network](#) at www.gsanetwork.org.

For more information on any of these opportunities for current and former foster youth, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at: 1-877-846-1602!

California Ombudsman for Foster Care

Help Line 1-877-846-1602

The Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman was established by legislation, California Senate Bill 933, and has been mandated to do the following:

- Ensure the voice of foster children and youth is heard, and act on their behalf.
- Create an avenue for foster children and youth to file complaints regarding their placement, care and services without fear of retribution from those who provide their care and services.
- Act as an independent forum for the investigation and resolution of complaints made by or on behalf of children placed in foster care and make appropriate referrals.
- Provide children and youth with information on their rights when placed in foster care.
- Maintain a toll-free telephone number which foster children and youth may call from anywhere in California to express their concerns and complaints.

Facts:

- The Foster Care Ombudsman Office established its toll free help line on May 2, 2000.
- The Ombudsman Office compiles all the complaints received and reports them annually to the Legislature.
- The staff for the Ombudsman's Office includes former foster youth.
- An All County Letter was distributed on August 25, 2000 which informs counties that all county social workers are required by SB 933 to provide foster children with information about the Office of the Ombudsman for Foster Care and the toll-free number.
- The Office has translation services available who speak Spanish and many other languages.

Frequently Asked Questions

How big does my problem have to be to call?

No matter the size, the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman can assist you with problems you are having in your placement. If we can't resolve the problem, we can refer you to someone who can.

If I already emancipated from foster care, can you help me?

The Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman can give you information about services available to emancipated foster youth such as how to get stipends, financial aid for college, and housing.

Who will you tell that I have made a complaint?

If you call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman to make a complaint, we will not tell anyone your identity without getting your permission first.

If I am being abused, can I make an anonymous complaint?

No. We take child abuse complaints very seriously. If someone is abusing you, our office must report it, which means we need to know who you are so the proper authorities can look into your complaint.

Can I make a complaint for someone else?

Yes, you can always call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman and make a complaint for someone else.

Can you help me find services or programs like money for college or money for housing?

The Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman can provide you with information about what services are available to foster youth in your county such as transitional housing programs, employment programs, scholarships, or independent living programs.

Toll-free number: 1-877-846-1602

E-mail address fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov

**To make a complaint: www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov/complaints.html
or fill out the complaint form on the following page.**

If the Foster Care Ombudsman's Office receives a complaint regarding child abuse, we are required by law to report this to Child Protective Services and/or Community Care Licensing.

Complaint Form

Information about the Foster Youth:

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Name of Home/Group Home: _____

Name of Social Worker: _____

Phone Number of Social Worker: _____

Name of Attorney: _____

Phone Number of Attorney: _____

Information about You (the Complainant)

Your Name: _____

Your Phone: _____

Your Address: _____

Are you the foster youth? _____

If not, what is your relationship to the youth involved?

Do you wish to remain anonymous? _____

Complaint (Include names, dates, locations, conversations, etc. you can attach another sheet of paper if you need to or write on the back of this sheet):

You can contact the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at:

Toll Free (877) 846-1602

FAX 916-651-6568

OR

via email: www.fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov

Send a complaint or letter to us at:

744 P Street, M.S. 8-13-25

Sacramento, California 95814



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
Kimberly Belshé, Secretary

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
John A. Wagner, Director