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The Honorable Corey Jackson
Chair, Assembly Human Services Committee
1020 O Street, Room 6120
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 369 (Zbur) Strengthening Independent Living Supports for Former Foster Youth – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Jackson:

[Organization name] is pleased to support AB 369 (Zbur), which strengthens independent living supports for transition age youth by seeking to exercise the federal option to provide independent living services to transition age youth up to age 23, requiring the Department of Social Services to evaluate and update the Independent Living Program, and updating state law to clarify that young adults can accumulate cash savings while in Extended Foster Care.

[Paragraph about organization and interest in the bill.]

California's Independent Living Program (ILP), funded by the federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program), provides supportive services to transition age youth who have been in foster care. Eligible youth may receive ILP services until they turn 21 years of age. Through ILP, youth learn about budgeting, postsecondary financial aid, and securing employment. Counties may use a portion of ILP funds for housing-related supports, including transitional housing.

For youth in foster care, turning 21 is a significant transition from financial, housing, and case management supports, to a much more limited safety net that young adults without permanent adult connections may struggle to navigate. The transition to adulthood after age 21 is particularly difficult if youth do not have sufficient savings to put down a security deposit on an apartment or cover emergency medical or family expenses.

California's current services do not sufficiently meet the needs of transition age youth (TAY). Evidence shows many former foster youth struggle while transitioning to adulthood and require continued assistance. Under 2018's Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), the federal government authorized states to expand the eligibility criteria for the ILP from age 21 to age 23. California has not yet opted to extend this program to support its TAY.

As well, there has been significant confusion at the county level about the extent to which youth in foster care can accumulate cash savings. State law (Welfare and Institutions Code section 11155.5) suggests that youth cannot save more than \$10,000 at any given time. Youth who had the good fortune of having more than \$10,000 in savings were advised to spend down those savings or else lose access to foster care benefits and other supports provided through Extended Foster Care. To address this confusion, in February 2022, the California

Department of Social Services issued All-County Letter 22-16, clarifying that while a youth whose savings exceed the \$10,000 may not be eligible for federal financial participation, they remain eligible for state foster care benefits and any other supports available through Extended Foster Care. Yet, advocates have reported that counties continue to discourage youth from saving their money, citing state law that has not been updated since the Department's issuance.

A strong safety net of financial support and services is critical to a successful transition into adulthood and is consistent with the purposes of the Independent Living Program and Extended Foster Care. AB 369 would expand ILP eligibility and update standards of care and services offered to better meet the needs of this unique TAY population and set them up for success by:

- Directing the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to amend its state plan(s) to raise the age of eligibility for Independent Living Program services up to 23 years of age;
- Directing CDSS to complete a comprehensive evaluation of California's ILP services with the intent of redesigning these services to be trauma-informed, relevant, and timely for youth across the age spectrum, and
- Clarifying state law concerning foster youth cash savings to reflect recent departmental guidance and ensure that youth can accumulate savings while in care.

For the reasons noted above, [Organization] supports AB 369 and requests your support.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title]

cc: Members and Staff, Assembly Human Services Committee
Assemblymember Zbur