March 10, 2015

The Honorable Tony Thurmond

Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1

State Capitol Building, Room 6026

Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Increase and Expand THP-Plus for Nonminor Dependents Aging Out of Care and to Homeless Youth - $30 Million

Dear Chair Thurmond,

In the last 10 years, California has made significant strides in addressing the needs of transition-age foster youth. In 2007 and 2008, California significantly expanded its investment in transitional housing for former foster youth and in 2010, California passed the landmark legislation, Assembly Bill 12, which allows youth in foster care to receive support until age 21. With these important policy changes, tens of thousands of otherwise homeless youth have received safe, affordable housing and are making a successful transition into adulthood.

While these policy changes are significant, there are numerous youth who continue to fall through the cracks in California. These include homeless youth and youth aging out of foster care who continue to need support, namely parenting youth and youth with a disability.

The issue of youth homelessness is a serious one in California, yet almost totally unaddressed. The last complete survey done by the California Homeless Youth Project showed that only 20 of the state’s 58 counties have direct services of any kind for homeless youth. Each year in California, over 50,000 youth age 18 to 24, experience homelessness. Many of these youth ran away or were kicked out of their homes as minors due to abuse and neglect, before they could be identified by the child protective system; and unfortunately, these youth are not eligible for services such as AB 12 or the Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus). Studies show that between 25-40% of this population became homeless after their families rejected them due to their sexual orientation. Despite this significant need, there are only 490 beds of transitional housing statewide to serve them, and often, these beds have long wait lists, which can typically be 6-12 months. In addition many of these are located in urban and city areas, leaving large parts of the state without any beds available at all.

The issue for high-need youth transitioning from foster care is equally serious. In 2015, over 2,000 youth will “age out” of extended foster care when they turn age 21. While most of these young adults will transition into economic stability, youth with disabilities and parenting youth will continue to face challenges. According to the latest data, over 330 youth who age out in 2015 will be a custodial parent and another 200 youth will exit care with a serious physical or mental disability. While the size of these groups is not large, their transition to economic stability is tenuous without the support required.

The undersigned organizations are proposing to address the serious issue faced by homeless youth and youth aging out of foster care by expanding access to the State’s transitional housing program, Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus). Specifically, we respectfully request a $30 million augmentation to THP-Plus, which would allow the program to provide safe, affordable housing and supportive services to 1,100 youth annually. Under this proposal, the eligibility criteria for THP-Plus would be modified to allow homeless youth, age 18 to 24, to participate in the program. The requested budget augmentation would be divided equally among the two populations to be served.

As you know, THP-Plus was established by the California State Legislature in 2001 and provides safe, affordable housing and supportive services to youth who turned age 18 while in the foster care or juvenile probation systems. It has been rigorously evaluated and found to improve outcomes in the area of education, health, criminal justice, economic security and housing stability. Currently, THP-Plus is administered by 50 county child welfare agencies and operated by 79 non-profit organizations. There are homeless youth providers who want to be able to expand their programs to ensure that homeless youth can take advantage of this proposed augmentation to THP-Plus. Your investment in this program to serve homeless youth will also help expand services to more areas of the state where none currently exist.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. By augmenting the budget of this effective program, and allowing homeless youth to be served by it, California will be making an important step forward in addressing youth homelessness.

We respectfully request the addition of $30 millionto be invested into the expansion of THP-Plus for youth aging out foster care and for homeless youth.

Thank you again.

cc: Members and Staff of the Assembly Budget Sub-Committee #1