

AB 1849 (Gipson): Medi-Cal for Emancipating Foster Youth

Summary

AB 1849 (Gipson) is a technical fix to Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) sections 391 and 16501.1 to conform these statutes to existing law that requires young people exiting foster care to be automatically enrolled in the Medi-Cal program for former foster youth (FFY).

Problem

Under the Affordable Care Act, former foster youth are entitled to Medi-Cal coverage until they turn 26. This gives FFY the same opportunity to access health care as young adults who are able to remain covered by their parents' health insurance until age 26.

Existing state law requires that youth who exit foster care on or after their eighteenth birthday be automatically transferred into the Medi-Cal program for FFY and remain continuously covered until age 26 without being required to re-enroll each year. When transitioning out of care, youth are not required to fill out any applications or otherwise apply for continuous coverage in the FFY program; enrollment should be automatic. See WIC § 14005.28.

WIC sections 391 and 16501.1 still contain outdated instructions for social workers preparing youth to transition out of foster care. These statutes require social workers to provide assistance in completing a Medi-Cal application, despite the fact that former foster youth are not required to apply for Medi-Cal to obtain coverage. The statutes also require social workers to provide information about options for health care coverage to youth exiting foster care, but do not explain that information about automatic Medi-Cal eligibility until age 26 should be provided.

Solution

AB 1849 (Gipson) will amend WIC sections 391 and 16501.1 to conform to existing law. These statutes will be amended to reflect the fact that FFY should be automatically transitioned into the Medi-Cal

program for FFY upon leaving foster care by removing the requirement that social workers help foster youth apply for Medi-Cal and by clarifying that child welfare and probation must ensure FFY have their Medi-Cal benefits cards, information regarding their eligibility for Medi-Cal until age 26, and verification that the young person has been transitioned into the Medi-Cal for FFY program with no interruption in coverage and no new application. AB 1849 is a simple fix that will ensure that young people exiting the foster care system can easily receive the health care they need and are entitled to under existing state law.

Background

Every month, hundreds of young people exit foster care at age 18 or older. For these young people, the ability to access health care coverage through Medi-Cal is crucial. Young people who grew up in foster care are more likely than their peers to have a chronic medical condition and to require behavioral health services. Without access to health insurance, these young people are at serious risk of ongoing health problems, and are likely to use costly emergency services.

Despite the urgent need to retain eligible young people in Medi-Cal and seamlessly transition them into the FFY program, the lack of conformity in existing law is a barrier to smooth transitions to continuing coverage, putting health at risk.

For More Information

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