



## **Fact Sheet: Technology Rights and Resources for Systems-Impacted Youth**

For youth in the foster care system, youth in the juvenile justice system, or youth experiencing homelessness (systems-involved or systems-impacted youth), being prevented from using technology, like a cell phone or laptop computer, can create a number of system-specific challenges. Whether for work, school, or simply to connect in the modern world, phones, computers, and internet connectivity are essential. Systems-impacted youth seek similar opportunities as their non-systems-impacted peers to learn vital applications and programs, explore the joys and risks of social media, and keep in touch with friends, family, and other important people in their lives. Phones and internet access are especially important to systems-impacted youth due to their experiences with isolation, alienation, the instability of personal connections, and difficulties dealing with placements in settings that can be new, unfamiliar, and transitory. Technology can strengthen social and family bonds, increase feelings of normalcy, and reduce trauma from and within systems in the process.

Each of the systems discussed below provides challenges for young people seeking access to technology. This resource outlines various rights guaranteed to systems-impacted youth in California and provides frameworks for understanding the contours of those rights.

### **Youth in Foster Care**

#### **Background**

California's Foster Youth Bill of Rights includes technology rights that empower young people in foster care. Despite the Bill of Rights' phone and internet protections described below, these rights do not always translate to everyday realities in technology access. According to a 2020 survey conducted by Pivotal, which surveyed 332 California youth in foster care in their postsecondary and high school programs, over 60% did not have access to a reliable laptop, 20% did not have access to reliable internet, and 12% did not have access to a reliable phone.<sup>1</sup>

The dynamics between foster youth and their caregivers also play a pivotal role in sustained and healthy relationships with technology. Navigating foster youths' technology use can be difficult for caregivers. For example, a caregiver may believe that phone or internet use is dangerous for their child and place strict limitations on it. Since caregivers are not required to provide a cell phone for foster children, and many foster youth may not have the resources to acquire phones

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<sup>1</sup> Gibson, D. (2021, July 14). *The Digital Divide*. PIVOTAL.  
[<https://www.pivotalnow.org/news/foster-care-system/the-digital-divide>].



and other technology on their own, youth may be unable to access these important resources unless they are appropriately aware of their options. Yet, youth in the foster care system may have legal rights to access technology in certain situations.

### **Legal Rights**

Youth in foster care have a number of basic rights that vary slightly depending on the technology in question. Foster youth have the following rights, unless barred by a court order:

- Foster youth have the right to have private phone calls and may have the right to acquire and use a cell phone.<sup>2</sup>
- Foster youth have the right to text people privately.<sup>3</sup>
- Foster youth have the right to use computers and access the internet for social and educational reasons.<sup>4</sup>
- Foster youth have the right to make complaints about violations of their rights or other harms, privately, to the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), tribal authority, and the California State Foster Care Ombudsperson.<sup>5</sup>

These rights are not unlimited, and may be impacted by the caregivers' application of the reasonable and prudent parent standard.

In California, foster youth caregivers (including short-term residential therapeutic programs (STRTPs), group home administrators, facility managers or their responsible designee, licensed certified foster parents, approved relative caregivers, approved nonrelative extended family members, and approved resource families) must apply a reasonable and prudent parent standard to determine whether to give foster youth permission to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.<sup>6</sup> This standard includes determinations regarding access to computer technology and the internet.<sup>7</sup>

While it is clear that the prudent parenting standard applies, it may not be clear how to apply that standard to specific situations. Disagreements about access issues can generate conflict between a foster youth and caregiver. A 2019 study of foster parents of 42 teens (ages 13-17) found that overall, "foster parents were at a loss for how to balance online safety with technology access in

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<sup>2</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §16001.9(a)(13)(2022); Note: foster youth in Resource Family (RFA) placements have the right to acquire, possess, and use their own cell phone. California Department of Social Services, Resource Family Approval Written Directives Article 11: Requirements for Resource Families, at §11-08(b)(3)(a) (Version 8, 2022), [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/portals/9/ccr/rfa/WD-V6.1-FINAL-1.7.20\\_AV.pdf](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/portals/9/ccr/rfa/WD-V6.1-FINAL-1.7.20_AV.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §16001.9(a)(13).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* §16001.9(a)(16).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* §16001.9(a)(41).

<sup>6</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §362.05(a)(1).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*



a way that engendered positive relationships with their foster teens.”<sup>8</sup> Without clear guidance or support, caregivers often defaulted to restrictions on technology.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, while caregivers are able to restrict technology access under the reasonable and prudent parent standard, the Foster Youth Bill of Rights makes clear that youth always have the right to communicate privately and “be provided the names and contact information for social workers, probation officers, attorneys, service providers, foster youth advocates and supporters, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), and education rights holders if other than the parent or parents, and when applicable, representatives designated by the child’s Indian tribe to participate in the juvenile court proceeding.”<sup>10</sup> Technology is an expected means to facilitate such communication, including via phone, text, messaging, and so on.

There are a number of best practices to help support caregivers in navigating technology access issues including:

- The foster youth’s social worker or probation officer can help caregivers understand and exercise the reasonable and prudent parent standard when they do not know if they should allow an activity. However, child welfare agencies and probation departments need to have informed, research-based policies on youth internet and technology use so that they can support caregivers and youth in navigating these issues. Otherwise, staff may defer to more risk-averse values, per an overview study on foster youth use of internet communication technology with caregiver supervision.<sup>11</sup>
- If caregivers and youth are not in agreement on technology, the Child and Family Team (CFT) should address and support them to find a resolution. Through the CFT process, these issues can be raised and mediated, including identifying other staff, such as case managers or Intensive Care Coordinators, who can help work with the family to resolve the issues and create a long-term plan clearly outlining tech access rules and rights as appropriate.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Badillo-Urquiola, K., Page, X., & Wisniewski, P. J. (2019). Risk vs. restriction: The tension between providing a sense of normalcy and keeping foster teens safe online. In *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 1–14); CAL. DEP’T OF SOC. SERVS., All County Information Notice No. 1-17-13, 6 (2013), [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acin/2013/1-17\\_13.pdf](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acin/2013/1-17_13.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Badillo-Urquiola, K., Page, X., & Wisniewski, P. J. (2019). Risk vs. restriction: The tension between providing a sense of normalcy and keeping foster teens safe online. In *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §16001.9(a)(11).

<sup>11</sup> Sage, M., & Jackson, S. (2022). A Systematic Review of Internet Communication Technology Use by Youth in Foster Care. *Child & adolescent social work journal: C & A*, 39(4), 375–390. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-021-00738-z>.

<sup>12</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §§ 16501.1(d)(2)(B)(i), 16001.9(a)(39)(C).



- If there is an urgent conflict, caregivers and youth can call the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) at 1-833-939-3877 at any time. FURS is a 24/7 hotline helping foster youth and families manage conflict and connect to local services and resources.<sup>13</sup>
- For youth who are survivors of childhood sexual exploitation, considerations of technology access can be even more fraught. Removing access to technology for youth who have experienced trauma might serve to further isolate them, depriving them of valuable social cohesion and connection to peers that can serve as healthy experiences.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, access to technology may be a serious safety risk, including potentially making it easier for perpetrators to locate these youth or lead to further exploitation.<sup>15</sup> CDSS has issued [further recommended practices](#) to guide caregivers in these situations.<sup>16</sup> This guide recommends best practices for caregivers, which can be applied to approaching technology access and applying a thoughtful, reasonable and prudent parent standard after the return of a foster youth. These practices include optimizing the youth's opportunities for choice, identifying additional support people for the youth, and using technology such as video conferencing to better facilitate connection between the support people and youth when in-person visitation is not feasible.<sup>17</sup>

## Education

For all youth, technology access in furtherance of their education is important. However, technology access is especially valuable for foster youth to not lose out on educational opportunities. Foster youth can be left behind or adversely impacted if they do not have appropriate access to technology, including at home in their foster placement to complete homework, socialize and build peer networks, and build vocational and life skills. Foster youth have legal rights to access a computer and the internet for social, extracurricular, and enrichment purposes as a part of their education.<sup>18</sup> Relatedly, foster youth students have the right to partial credit for completed coursework, access to afterschool programs, and all other necessary educational supports and benefits, as described in the state Education Code.<sup>19</sup> The successful utilization of these programs and activities may require access to online and technology-based

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<sup>13</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE § 16526 *et. seq.*; CAL. DEP'T OF SOC. SERVS., *Foster Care: Family Urgent Response System* (2024), <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/foster-care/furs/adler32.ert5fg>.

<sup>14</sup> Badillo-Urquiola, K., Page, X., & Wisniewski, P. J. (2019). Risk vs. restriction: The tension between providing a sense of normalcy and keeping foster teens safe online. In *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> CAL. DEP'T OF SOC. SERVS., All County Information Notice No. 1-19-14, 1 (2014), [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acin/2014/1-19\\_14.pdf](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acin/2014/1-19_14.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> CAL. DEP'T OF SOC. SERVS., All County Letter No. 16-15, 1-2 (2016), <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/entres/getinfo/acl/2016/16-15.pdf>; CAL. DEP'T OF SOC. SERVS., All County Information Notice No. 1-19-14, 5 (2014), [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acin/2014/1-19\\_14.pdf](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acin/2014/1-19_14.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE § 16001.9(a)(16).

<sup>19</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE § 16001.9(a)(27); CAL. ED. CODE § 48850(a)(1).



platforms, and could relate to the state's broad charge to provide foster youth with meaningful opportunities to meet the challenging achievement standards to which all students are held.<sup>20</sup>

Foster youth also have the right to access existing information regarding available postsecondary educational options, including but not limited to career, technical, and postsecondary program options, as well as knowledge of specialized programs for current and former foster youth at the University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges.<sup>21</sup> It is essential for foster youth to utilize technology to evaluate post-secondary education options and access higher education programming, as demonstrated by an evaluation report summarizing three studies conducted with 730 foster youth in California from 2013-2015 by an independent researcher and the organization iFoster (explained further below).<sup>22</sup> The summary of these longitudinal studies found that youth in foster care had considerably lower access to computers at home than non-foster youth, including only 5% of rural foster youth and 21% of urban foster youth.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, when provided with a laptop, foster youth reported 98% daily or weekly use, corresponding with measurable improvements in academic performance, social connectedness, and life satisfaction and preparation for post-secondary options.<sup>24</sup> Just over half of the sample participants were in high school and at the age of evaluating postsecondary education options, while 22% were in college at the time while utilizing access to a laptop and the internet.<sup>25</sup>

### LifeLine Foster Youth Program and the California LifeLine Program

There are multiple programs available in California to assist youth in foster care or previously in foster care in accessing technology. Limited by certain eligibility criteria, foster youth seeking access to cell phones are eligible to receive a phone through the California LifeLine Foster Youth Program, currently operated by Maximus and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).<sup>26</sup> The LifeLine Foster Youth Program provides eligible California foster youth with

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<sup>20</sup> CAL. ED. CODE §48850(a)(1).

<sup>21</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §16001.9(a)(28); CAL. DEP'T OF SOC. SERVS., All County Letter No. 18-104, 2-3 (2018), <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/ACL/2018/18-104.pdf?ver=2018-09-14-125746-300>; CAL. DEP'T OF SOC. SERVS., All County Information Notice No. I-08-23, 3 (2023), [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACINs/2023/I-08\\_23.pdf?ver=2023-03-08-131108-247](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACINs/2023/I-08_23.pdf?ver=2023-03-08-131108-247). Note: ACIN I-08-23 contains best practices regarding whom to contact and to document as the postsecondary education support person.

<sup>22</sup> Goldbach, J. & iFoster (2016), 1 Laptop Program For Foster Youth: Evaluation Report, 2, [www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1\\_Laptop\\_FCC\\_Evaluation\\_Report.pdf](http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1_Laptop_FCC_Evaluation_Report.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 13.

<sup>26</sup> Note: The LifeLine Foster Youth Program became a permanent program in May 2024. Prior to this time, it was a pilot program operated by iFoster and the CPUC. Decision Establishing the California LifeLine Foster Youth Long-Term Program. Decision 24-05-003. May 9, 2024, <https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M531/K319/531319661.PDF>.



smartphones and monthly mobile services (including unlimited data and hotspot) for free.<sup>27</sup> The program is for youth ages 13 through 20 (have not reached their 21st birthday) who are in foster care or extended foster care.<sup>28</sup> Youth who leave foster care at age 18 or older are eligible for the program for six (6) months after they leave foster care or until they turn 21 years old (whichever comes first).<sup>29</sup> Individuals can create an [account](#) for the program portal to begin an application. If the foster youth is under 18, a caregiver or caseworker can sign the application, while foster youth 18 years or older can apply on their own.<sup>30</sup> If these phones are ever broken, lost, stolen, or other issues arise, the LifeLine Foster Youth Program can be contacted toll-free at 1-833-560-7477, where administrators can provide support in English or Spanish.<sup>31</sup>

Once a young adult ages out of the LifeLine Foster Youth Program, they may be eligible for the California LifeLine Program. This is a program for individuals age 18 or older in California who qualify as low income.<sup>32</sup> The California LifeLine Program provides low-to-no-cost phone service to eligible households. With the California LifeLine program, individuals can choose between cell phone service or landline phone service, and can choose from a variety of phone providers and plan options. A household is eligible for the LifeLine program based on (1) receiving certain benefits or (2) meeting income limits.<sup>33</sup>

First, a household may be eligible if they are receiving benefits like Medi-Cal, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), CalFresh, CalWORKs, or federal housing assistance such as Housing Choice Vouchers or the Foster Youth to Independence or Family Unification Program Voucher.<sup>34</sup> [This link](#) provides a full list of qualifying programs.<sup>35</sup> Second, if a household does not meet the

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<sup>27</sup> See CAL. PUB. UTIL. CODE §871.5(b); CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, *California LifeLine Program Frequently Asked Questions* (2024), <https://www.californialifeline.com/en/faq>.

<sup>28</sup> Decision Establishing the California LifeLine Foster Youth Long-Term Program Decision 24-05-003. Page 8. May 9, 2024; See also CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, *California LifeLine Foster Program* (2024). [https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/consumer-support/financial-assistance-savings-and-discounts/lifeline/pilots-and-government-partnerships/california-lifeline-foster-program#:~:text=Age%20Requirements%3A&text=Minors%20\(ages%2013%E2%80%9317\)%3A,foster%20care%20or%20turning%2021](https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/consumer-support/financial-assistance-savings-and-discounts/lifeline/pilots-and-government-partnerships/california-lifeline-foster-program#:~:text=Age%20Requirements%3A&text=Minors%20(ages%2013%E2%80%9317)%3A,foster%20care%20or%20turning%2021).

<sup>29</sup> CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, *California LifeLine Foster Program* (2024). [https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/consumer-support/financial-assistance-savings-and-discounts/lifeline/pilots-and-government-partnerships/california-lifeline-foster-program#:~:text=Age%20Requirements%3A&text=Minors%20\(ages%2013%E2%80%9317\)%3A,foster%20care%20or%20turning%2021](https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/consumer-support/financial-assistance-savings-and-discounts/lifeline/pilots-and-government-partnerships/california-lifeline-foster-program#:~:text=Age%20Requirements%3A&text=Minors%20(ages%2013%E2%80%9317)%3A,foster%20care%20or%20turning%2021).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, *California LifeLine Program Contact Us* (2025). <https://www.californialifeline.com/Foster/en/contact>.

<sup>32</sup> See CAL. PUB. UTIL. CODE §871.5.

<sup>33</sup> CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, *California LifeLine Eligibility* (2025). <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/consumer-support/financial-assistance-savings-and-discounts/lifeline/california-lifeline-eligibility>; CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, General Order 153. Procedures for Administration of Moore Universal Telephone Service Act (California LifeLine Program) General Order 5.4.1.1.1., Revised Pursuant to D.21-09-023. Page 14. September 23, 2021. <https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M421/K790/421790945.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*



program-based qualification method, a household can establish eligibility based on their income.<sup>36</sup> Many youth leaving foster care are eligible for and receive benefits such as Medi-Cal, so they should be eligible for the LifeLine Program when they leave foster care.<sup>37</sup>

To apply for the California LifeLine Program, an individual selects a California LifeLine Service Provider by using [this link](#) and inputting their zip code.<sup>38</sup> An individual would then call the service provider they have selected and ask to apply for the program. The customer service representative can walk the applicant through the process and help them complete an online application or send them a paper application in the mail to complete and send back. Individuals can find more details about the program and how to apply [here](#).<sup>39</sup>

## Juvenile Justice System-Involved Youth

### **Background**

Many young people in the juvenile justice system remain in the care of their families while under probation (mandated supervision through juvenile court jurisdiction). There are also many youth on probation in out-of-home care, and/or living in licensed or certified children's facilities or homes in California; these young people have similar concerns about technology access barriers as foster youth, and they would also have the same legal entitlements as foster youth under the Foster Youth Bill of Rights.<sup>40</sup> Beyond those juvenile justice impacted youth on probation or in out-of-home placement, 29% of the 10,647 youth adjudged to be a ward of the court were sent to secure county facilities in California in 2023, totalling 3,092 youth.<sup>41</sup> For youth in secure settings, from a practical standpoint, access to technology is essential to navigating this system for several reasons. Phone calls and videoconferencing, for example, often play a key role in helping youth stay connected during a period of detention. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the increased utilization of video-conferencing platforms that yielded promising applications for larger scale use throughout the juvenile justice system.<sup>42</sup> Maintaining connection

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<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 1396a(a)(10)(A)(i)(IX). Note: Youth in and exiting from extended foster care may also be eligible for CalFresh. For more information, see YOUTH LAW CENTER, *CalFresh for Nonminor Dependents (NMDs) and Youth Exiting Foster Care: A Fact Sheet for Advocates* (2024).

<https://www.ylc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CalFresh-and-NMDs-.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, *Provider Search, Home and Cell Phone* (2025).

[https://www.californialifeline.com/en/provider\\_search](https://www.californialifeline.com/en/provider_search).

<sup>39</sup> CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION, *California LifeLine Program* (2025).

<https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/consumer-support/financial-assistance-savings-and-discounts/lifeline>.

<sup>40</sup> CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSPERSON, *Know Your Rights* (2025),

<https://fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov/foster-youth-rights/>; CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §16001.9(a).

<sup>41</sup> CAL. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, *Juvenile Justice in California 2023* (2023).

<https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2024-07/Juvenile%20Justice%20In%20CA%202023f.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> See generally Tolou-Shams, M., Bath, E., McPhee, J., Folk, J. B., Porche, M. V., & Fortuna, L. R. (2022). Juvenile Justice, Technology and Family Separation: A Call to Prioritize Access to Family-Based Telehealth Treatment for



with family and community is critical for youth and transition-aged youth during residential placement, with studies showing that youth who receive more family contact while in residential placement have improved behavioral and academic outcomes during that time.<sup>43</sup>

Youth in secure detention are sometimes severely restricted in contacting family and members of their support network. For example, in Los Angeles County, while in secure detention youth are not able to receive incoming calls or messages, and outgoing calls are only available at certain times of day, which may be further limited in duration by the need for all detained youth to receive an opportunity to use the telephones.<sup>44</sup> In San Francisco County, youth are guaranteed a 5-minute social call twice a week.<sup>45</sup> While this rule may serve as a minimum, it also demonstrates how restrictions can be wholly outside the youth's control and within the discretion of juvenile justice system staff.

## **Legal Rights**

The technology rights of youth detained in a juvenile justice facility largely fall into three categories: (1) basic rights and protections, (2) maintaining relationships, and (3) education.

### **Basic Rights and Protections**

In California, following arrest, youth are entitled "to make at least two free telephone calls within an hour after initially being placed in a juvenile facility."<sup>46</sup> All confined youth have the right "to make and receive confidential telephone calls, send and receive confidential mail, and have confidential visits with attorneys and their authorized representatives, ombudspersons, including the Division of the Ombudsperson of the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR), and other advocates, holders of public office, state and federal court personnel, and legal service organizations."<sup>47</sup>

### **Maintaining Relationships**

Justice-Involved Adolescents' Mental Health and Well-Being. *Frontiers in digital health*, 4, 867366.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fdgth.2022.867366>.

<sup>43</sup> ELIZABETH SEIGLE, NASTASSIA WALSH, AND JOSH WEBER, CORE PRINCIPLES FOR REDUCING RECIDIVISM AND IMPROVING OTHER OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM (NEW YORK: COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS JUSTICE CENTER, 2014). <https://csgjusticecenter.org>.

[/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Juvenile-Justice-White-Paper-with-Appendices-1-1.pdf](#); Sandra Villalobos Agudelo, *The Impact of Family Visitation on Incarcerated Youth's Behavior and School Performance* 4 (2013).

<https://static.prisonpolicy.org/scans/impact-of-family-visitation-on-incarcerated-youth-brief.pdf6>.

<sup>44</sup> Los Angeles County Probation, Detention Services Bureau Parent Handbook. Pages 26-27. 2022.

[https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/probation/1120126\\_DSB\\_ParentHandbookBookletVersion021722FINAL.pdf](https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/probation/1120126_DSB_ParentHandbookBookletVersion021722FINAL.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> SAN FRANCISCO JUVENILE PROBATION DEP'T., JUVENILE HALL POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL: CHAPTER 5 – YOUTH RIGHTS 8, §5.09. <https://www.sf.gov/reports/january-2023/juvenile-justice-center-policy-and-procedures>.

<sup>46</sup> See CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE § 224.71(r); CAL. CODE REGS. TIT. 15, §1350(a)(1).

<sup>47</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §224.71(h).



In California, all youth confined in a juvenile facility have the right “to maintain frequent and continuing contact with parents, guardians, siblings, children, and extended family members, through visits, telephone calls, and mail.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, “[y]outh may be provided with access to computer technology and the internet for maintaining relationships with family as an alternative to, but not a replacement for, in-person visiting.”<sup>49</sup> Senate Bill 1008 (2022), also known as the Keeping Families Connected Act, requires that residential placements or detention centers provide voice communication services to incarcerated youth free of charge (both to the person initiating and the person receiving the communication).<sup>50</sup> The Act also requires service quality standards for any providers of communication services to state or local correctional facilities.<sup>51</sup>

### Education

Youth in juvenile facilities, including juvenile halls, ranches, camps, or forestry camps, have the right “to receive a rigorous, quality education that complies with state law” and “have access to computer technology and internet for the purposes of education and to continue to receive educational services while on disciplinary or medical status.”<sup>52</sup> Given both the general prevalence of technology-based curriculum and coursework, combined with the non-standard educational environment, education-related technology access is essential to youth learning in juvenile facilities. Technology can also allow court schools to provide much-needed educational resources, preparing students for and providing access to post-secondary education (e.g. workshops for completing college and financial aid applications, online courses through videoconferencing and closed circuit televised classes, and interactive software programs).<sup>53</sup>

However, detained youth face many practical challenges due to frequent technological limitations in many detention facility schools. Students often lack access to resources essential to learning and completing coursework such as the internet, comprehensive libraries, and computers.<sup>54</sup> As such, the realities of these educational rights vary greatly for youth in detention. OYCR highlighted a recent pilot study that assessed the benefits of various approaches for

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<sup>48</sup> *Id.* §224.71(g)

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* §208.1(a).

<sup>51</sup> CAL. PUB. UTIL. CODE §2899(b).

<sup>52</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §§ 224.71(n), 851.1(a)(1), 889.1.

<sup>53</sup> YOUTH LAW CENTER, *Educational Injustice: Barriers to Achievement and Higher Education for Youth in California Juvenile Court Schools*, 25 (2016).

<https://www.ylc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/EDUCATIONAL-INJUSTICE.pdf>; OFFICE OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY RESTORATION, *Building Higher Education Pathways for Youth in Secure Treatment Facilities in California: A Call to Action*, 46-47 (2024).

[https://oycr.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/346/2024/02/BuildingHigerEdu\\_Final.pdf](https://oycr.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/346/2024/02/BuildingHigerEdu_Final.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> YOUTH LAW CENTER, *supra* note 53; OFFICE OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY RESTORATION, *supra* note 53.



delivering online courses in secure detention settings.<sup>55</sup> It found that the use of laptops was superior to tablets, due to greater functionality, and the need for facilities to provide software that could restrict access to non-course-related websites.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the pilot found that, in addition to online textbooks, physical textbooks were considered essential, because tangible books can be transported and studied throughout a facility.<sup>57</sup>

In 2024, the [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#) (EFF), in conjunction with Youth Law Center, submitted a statewide California Public Records Act (CPRA) request to each of California's fifty-eight counties responsible for administering its local juvenile justice system.<sup>58</sup> Among related issues, the primary purpose of the CPRA was to learn about technology access policies, procedures, and practices in the context of alignment with the rights outlined in [AB 2448](#).<sup>59</sup> AB 2448, implemented through amendments to Sections 362.05 and 727 and additions of Sections 851.1 and 889.1 to the California Welfare and Institutions Code, requires residential juvenile detention settings to provide detained youth with access to computer technology and the internet for the purpose of maintaining relationships with family.<sup>60</sup> The law further requires that detained youth can access computer technology and the internet for the purposes of age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.<sup>61</sup> Lastly, AB 2448 requires that youth detained in or committed to a juvenile hall, or other settings such as a juvenile ranch, camp, or forestry camp, shall be provided with access to computer technology and the internet for the purposes of education.<sup>62</sup>

An initial review of the documents received by EFF and Youth Law Center indicated several best practices that county-level Probation Departments, in conjunction with county-level Offices of Education, have implemented. These practices include providing robust access to technology without overly-burdensome monitoring, the integration of video calling systems to *supplement* in-person visitation, and the regular utilization of dedicated, readily-available laptops and tablets for education curriculum. This access can help youth keep up with academic coursework and credit, as well as acquire extracurricular skills such as coding and trades-based competencies. For additional information on this CPRA and county-specific practices, please contact Youth Law Center.

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<sup>55</sup> OFFICE OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY RESTORATION, *supra* note 53 at 47.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> The Electronic Frontier Foundation (2025), <https://www.eff.org/>.

<sup>59</sup> Assembly Bill No. 2448, Juveniles: Rights: Computer Technology (2017-2018), [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180AB2448](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB2448); CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §§ 362.05, 727, 851.1, 889.1.

<sup>60</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §362.05(a)(1).

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> *Id.* §§851.1(a)(1), 889.1(a)(1).



## LifeLine Foster Youth Program and the California LifeLine Program

The LifeLine Foster Youth Program, described above, is critical to maintaining relationships, both prior to and after a period of incarceration. While many of the rights in this section apply specifically to youth held in custody at a juvenile detention facility, youth in the juvenile justice system placed elsewhere may be eligible for free phone service under certain circumstances. A youth who is adjudicated a ward of the court and has an order for foster care placement has the same rights as any other foster youth to enroll in the LifeLine Foster Youth phone program.<sup>63</sup>

## **Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

### **Background**

Many youth experiencing homelessness do not have stable access to the internet or technology, which can serve as critical lifelines to help youth stay safe and reconnect with family, friends and community.<sup>64</sup> Even when youth are able to make their way to a shelter, internet access is not guaranteed. For example, Larkin Street Youth Services, San Francisco's largest nonprofit working to end youth homelessness, was selected to receive free Wi-Fi services through a grant operated by the organization ShelterTech.<sup>65</sup> While ShelterTech has installed Wi-Fi in 10 shelter and single-room occupancy hotel sites since 2016, and selected 8 additional sites for internet installation in 2019, all of which are associated with Larkin Street, the services may still be a rarity outside of this project.

Publicly-accessible information on Wi-Fi availability is limited.<sup>66</sup> Case managers working with people experiencing homelessness have reported that many clients choose a shelter based on its amenities, and internet access is the most critical consideration.<sup>67</sup> Youth experiencing homelessness rely on phones and other internet-enabled devices in a variety of critical ways, including using phones to connect with home-based peers, family, and case workers, which is associated with a reduction in substance use, risky sexual health behaviors, and mental health

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<sup>63</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §16001.9(a).

<sup>64</sup> Melia Russell. (Feb. 3, 2019). *Smartphones Are a Lifeline For the Young Homeless. If Only They Had Wi-Fi*, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE.  
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/business/article/Smartphones-are-a-lifeline-for-the-young-13582809.php>.

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> *Id.*



problems.<sup>68</sup> These young people also use the internet to search for housing, employment, and health information.<sup>69</sup>

## **Legal Rights**

Throughout this section, the term “youth shelter” refers to a “youth homelessness prevention center,” which means a “group home licensed by the California Department [of Social Services] (CDSS) to operate a program pursuant to Health and Safety Code Section 1502.35 to provide voluntary, short-term, shelter and personal services to homeless youth, youth who are at risk of homelessness, youth who are exhibiting status offender behavior, or runaway youth, as defined in Section 1502.35(a)(2).”<sup>70</sup>

Legal rights to technology for youth in youth shelters can be divided generally into the following categories: (1) admission and accommodation rights; (2) control of technology, privacy, and access; (3) accountability mechanisms; and (4) exit rights.

### **Admission and Accommodation Rights**

A clear explanation of technology policies must be provided upon admission to a youth shelter. This includes a youth shelter’s house rules, including policies on cell phone use, other internet enabled devices (such as laptop computers and tablets), and other personal property.<sup>71</sup> In addition, a youth shelter must inform the youth of their right to have confidential communications, unless prohibition is needed for the protection of the youth or other youth in the facility.<sup>72</sup> These rights related to confidential communications include making and receiving confidential phone calls, sending and receiving unopened mail, and sending and receiving unopened electronic communication, if the youth shelter provides access to a computer.<sup>73</sup>

Upon admission, each youth shall be notified that they are entitled to obtain services and equipment to improve the quality of their telecommunications if they are hearing or speech impaired or have other disabilities.<sup>74</sup> The youth shelter must provide each youth with a [Telecommunications Device Notification form](#) (LIC 9158).<sup>75</sup>

### **Technology Control, Privacy, and Access**

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<sup>68</sup> Lal S, Halicki-Asakawa A and Fauvelle A (2021) A Scoping Review on Access and Use of Technology in Youth Experiencing Homelessness: Implications for Healthcare. *Front. Digit. Health* 3:782145. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdgth.2021.782145>.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> CAL. HEALTH & SAF. CODE §1502(a)(14).

<sup>71</sup> CAL. DEP’T OF SOC. SERVS., YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION CENTERS INTERIM LICENSING STANDARD (ILS) VERSION 2 (2020), §84522(c)(6).

<sup>72</sup> *Id.* §84572(b)(5).

<sup>73</sup> *Id.* §84572(b)(5)(A)-(C).

<sup>74</sup> CAL. HEALTH & SAF. CODE §1524.7.

<sup>75</sup> CAL. DEP’T OF SOC. SERVS, Youth Homelessness Prevention Centers Interim Licensing Standard (ILS) Version 2 (2020), §84568(f).



In a youth shelter, youth shall have control of their cash resources, personal property, and valuables, such as their cell phone and other electronic devices, unless they entrust them to the youth shelter pursuant to the youth shelter's house rules.<sup>76</sup> If a youth entrusts these items to the youth shelter, the shelter must prepare an itemized list at the time this occurs and provide a copy of the itemized list to the youth at their request.<sup>77</sup> Any restrictions on these rights must be specified in the youth shelter's house rules.<sup>78</sup>

Additionally, the youth shelter must:

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- Have telephone service on the premises, and, at all times, telephone service shall be readily accessible to all youth.<sup>79</sup>
- If the shelter subscribes to an Internet service, it shall be readily accessible to a youth in the shelter.<sup>80</sup>
- Allow youth to use their own cell phone or internet enabled device (e.g. a tablet or laptop), pursuant to the youth shelter's house rules.<sup>81</sup>

Youth also have the right to be free from unreasonable searches of their person or personal belongings.<sup>82</sup> Finally, the youth shelter may provide access to information and services to assist a youth in preparing for available vocational and postsecondary educational pathways by providing internet research on postsecondary or vocational schools or programs, financial aid, independent living skills programs, and other local resources.<sup>83</sup>

### Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability measures and structures exist to ensure that young people experiencing homelessness have options for recourse if their rights are violated, including:

- To contact the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and to speak to representatives of these offices confidentially, and to be free from threats or punishment for making complaints.<sup>84</sup>
- All youth shelter staff and volunteers must be trained to report violations of any of youth's personal rights.<sup>85</sup>
- Youth shelters must develop, maintain, and implement written complaint procedures by which the youth and their authorized representatives can file complaints with the shelter

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<sup>76</sup> *Id.* §84526(c).

<sup>77</sup> *Id.* §84526(d)(1)-(2).

<sup>78</sup> *Id.* §§84526(c), 84522(c)(6).

<sup>79</sup> *Id.* §84573(a)(1).

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* §84573(a)(2).

<sup>81</sup> *Id.* §84573(a)(3).

<sup>82</sup> *Id.* §84572(b)(9).

<sup>83</sup> *Id.* §84577(b)(1)-(14).

<sup>84</sup> *Id.* §84572(b)(4).

<sup>85</sup> *Id.* §84565(d)(4).



administrator regarding shelter staff, volunteers, or operations without fear of retaliation.<sup>86</sup> All staff, volunteers, and youth shall receive copies of these procedures, and these procedures shall be posted in a location in the youth homelessness prevention center that is accessible to both youth and the public.<sup>87</sup>

### Exit Rights

If the cash resources, personal property, and valuables, such as a youth's phone or other electronic devices, are entrusted to the youth shelter, the youth shelter must promptly return them in accordance with proper procedure. The youth shelter must return all items to the youth (or their designee) at their request, or during a planned discharge.<sup>88</sup> The shelter shall:

- Allow the youth, or their designee, the opportunity to inspect the itemized list to ensure that all items are returned or surrendered;<sup>89</sup>
- Obtain a receipt signed and dated by the youth (or their designee) when returning items;<sup>90</sup>
- Retain cash resources, personal property, and valuables left behind by the youth for a minimum of 30 days when a youth leaves the youth shelter without notifying staff, or if the youth did not receive personal property and valuables during discharge;<sup>91</sup>
- Maintain accurate records of cash resources, personal property, and valuables;<sup>92</sup>
- Keep an itemized list in the youth's records;<sup>93</sup> and
- Retain records of all cash resources, personal property, and valuables for a minimum of three years.<sup>94</sup>

### Education

Each state educational agency shall ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children and youth, and homeless children.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, youth should have access to the educational and related services they need to ensure they have an opportunity to meet the same challenging state academic standards to which all students are held.<sup>96</sup> As such, youth could utilize computers, tablets, and other internet-enabled devices necessary to complete homework and to succeed in their educational programs.

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<sup>86</sup> *Id.* §84572.2(b).

<sup>87</sup> *Id.* §84572.2(b)(1)-(2).

<sup>88</sup> *Id.* §84526(d)(3).

<sup>89</sup> *Id.* §84526(d)(4).

<sup>90</sup> *Id.* §84526(d)(5).

<sup>91</sup> *Id.* §84526(d)(6).

<sup>92</sup> *Id.* §84526(d)(7).

<sup>93</sup> *Id.* §84526(d)(7)(A).

<sup>94</sup> *Id.* §84526(d)(7)(B).

<sup>95</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 11431(1).

<sup>96</sup> *Id.* § 11431(4).



### LifeLine Foster Youth Program and the California LifeLine Program

Homeless youth and young adults may have access to free or low cost cell phone service if they are eligible for the LifeLine Foster Youth Program or the LifeLine Program. Some youth in foster care, including youth in extended foster care, may experience homelessness while they are in foster care. Youth aged 13 through 20 should be eligible for the LifeLine Foster Youth Program. As long as the child welfare agency or juvenile probation department has placement and care responsibility for the youth or young adult, the youth is considered to be in foster care and may be eligible for the LifeLine Foster Youth Program.<sup>97</sup>

In addition, homeless young adults or judicially emancipated minors who are homeless may be eligible for the California LifeLine Program, permitting them to access a cell phone and free or low cost service based on their current receipt of benefits like Medi-Cal or based on their income.

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<sup>97</sup> CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §11400(k).