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February 4, 2022

Dear New Mexico State Legislature:

I am writing on behalf of NMCAN, an organization that partners with young people impacted by foster care, juvenile justice, or homelessness to improve their transition to adulthood.

NMCAN stands in support of SB 140 - Opportunity Scholarship Act.

We believe all young people and their families deserve equitable access to the systems that are built to support them. Higher education is one example. Improving educational attainment for young people impacted by systems, and all members of our community, requires New Mexico to think holistically. We must acknowledge that nonacademic factors such as mental/physical health, housing, childcare, etc. may be attributed to their success.

We support SB 140 because it not only removes financial barriers to educational access through free tuition *and* fees, but it recognizes that not all educational paths are linear. Many students in our state do not attend college full-time, and as mentioned above, life's circumstances can get in the way of persisting in one's education. SB 140 offers equity by not limiting the number of semesters or years a student can access the scholarship and allows for part-time enrollment. We recommend one further step to ensure equity by finding an alternative to the 2.5 GPA requirement; a difficult semester caused by a shift in life circumstances should not halt access to a student's education.

The Opportunity Scholarship Act has the potential to make higher education accessible to those who have historically been excluded, including young people impacted by poverty, homelessness, and justice systems.

We respectfully ask for your support of SB 140.

Thank you.

Arika E. Sánchez
Director of Policy and Advocacy