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March 16, 2021

The Honorable Connie M. Leyva, Chair  
Senate Committee on Education  
1020 N Street, Room 4061  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SUPPORT - SB532 (CABALLERO) - SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Leyva,

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports SB 532.**

SB 532 would strengthen existing law (Education Code 51225.1) to mitigate a permanent, post-pandemic departure from school for California's highly mobile students (in foster care, homeless child or youth, a former juvenile court school, military family, or a migratory child or newcomer). This bill clarifies the education code to require schools and school districts to inform highly mobile students of their right to remain in school for a 5th year, to exempt qualified pupils from local graduation requirements when requested, and extend the state requirements into the fifth year at their school of origin as applicable. Additionally, this bill streamlines a student's

ability to opt into these options if they are a highly mobile student attending school as unaccompanied youth.

A high school diploma is a documented pathway out of poverty for many young people. A high school diploma offers access to a wide array of career, educational and vocational opportunities. Additionally, students that do not achieve a high school diploma are at greater risk for negative life outcomes such as health disparities, lower employment earnings, homelessness, and criminal justice involvement. Not attaining a high school degree is the greatest single risk factor for homelessness as a young adult. Strengthening E.C. 51225.1 will help to mitigate a permanent, post-pandemic departure from school for California's highly mobile students. The COVID19 pandemic and move to distance learning have exacerbated school engagement and learning disparities for these groups of students. Lack of suitable learning environments, lack of support from adults to navigate online learning, trauma, social isolation, and family stressors contribute to the burdens students are carrying. It is anticipated that many students will experience substantial learning loss and credit deficiencies, and highly mobile students are most vulnerable to long-term disconnection from school.

SB 532 would improve access to high school diplomas for highly mobile students by:

- ensuring that students who are eligible to remain in school for a fifth year can remain in their school of origin, consistent with federal law, to either complete the local educational graduation requirements or the statewide graduation requirements;
- allowing districts to determine a student's year in school by comparing the student's age to the average age of students in their third or fourth year;
- requiring schools to evaluate student eligibility for an exemption within 30 days of a new school year following a school move, and exempt students if they are unable to meet the district requirements at the end of their fourth year;

- applies the exemption from district diploma requirements that are in addition to statewide diploma requirements to eligible students enrolled in adult education regardless of their age as well as adult education students who were eligible for the exemption while in high school; and
- recognizing the ability of unaccompanied homeless youth to act as their own educational decision-makers for purposes of E.C. 51225.1, in alignment with the federal McKinney-Vento Act.

The provisions included in SB 532 strengthen and expand access to high school diplomas for highly mobile students and create opportunities for post-secondary success. We strongly urge the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gregory Cramer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Gregory Cramer  
Senior Legislative Advocate  
Disability Rights California