
FOR LAWMAKERS, THESE BILLS SHOULD BE A CALL TO ARMS

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War may be hell, but growing up as a *foster* child can be worse: A recent study by Harvard Medical School and Casey Family Programs found that people who grew up in *foster* care were twice as likely as U.S. war veterans to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Being abused or neglected as children, being removed from the only family they know and being moved about from *foster* home to group home can mark children for life. Is it any wonder that former *foster* kids are more likely to fail in school, develop mental health problems, go to prison or end up on welfare?

Fortunately, Americans are increasingly aware of the needs of *foster* children and are taking steps to help. In California, lawmakers have strengthened the rights of *foster* children to education, housing and protection from abuse. Bills before the Legislature this year would go further, addressing some of the recommendations in the Harvard-Casey study.

In his commentary on the opposite page today, Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Leonard *Edwards* endorses AB 880 by Assemblywoman Rebecca Cohn, D-Campbell, which would ensure that *foster* children are connected with family members and other caring adults before they leave the system. Experts who study traumatized children find that those who become well-adjusted adults have constant, caring adults in their lives. Too many *foster* children leave the system with no one to lean on for advice and no place to go for the holidays.

Tuesday, another important *foster*-care bill was approved by the Assembly Human Services Committee. AB 824, by Assemblywoman Judy Chu, D-Monterey Park, would extend housing support for *foster* children up to age 24 -- another recommendation from the Harvard-Casey report.

Especially in high-priced Silicon Valley, it's common for young adults to live at home or hit up Mom and Dad for rent money until they are well into their 20s. *Foster* children are

cut off from housing support at age 21. That's one reason fewer than 10 percent of them enroll in college and only 1 percent graduate. It also explains why nearly a third become homeless.

Americans are appalled by the idea of sending children to war, but we're sending abused and neglected children off to fight a private war every day. The least we can do is help them win it, by reforming the child-welfare system and breaking the cycle of child abuse. Passing AB 880 and AB 824 must be part of the battle plan.

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