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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLLEGE-BOUND FOSTER YOUTH GET FINANCIAL HELP TO PAY FOR SCHOOL EXPENSES

John Burton Foundation to Provide \$100,000 to Students Statewide

College students across the nation are returning to classes this week, after a visit home with family for the Thanksgiving holiday.

That's not the case for thousands of college students who "age out" of California's foster care system, such as Star Simmons. Star was placed into foster care as an infant and after "aging out" when she turned 18 was homeless, unemployed and experimenting with drugs. Through her perseverance and the assistance of Oakland-based nonprofit First Place for Youth, Star is now a student at Diablo Valley Community College, working towards a college degree.

Students such as Star will get a little extra help this holiday season, thanks to a partnership between The California Student Aid Commission (Commission), the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes, LA Cash for College and Wells Fargo Bank.

The John Burton Foundation – a nonprofit organization founded by former California State Senator John Burton and dedicated to improving the quality of life for homeless children and foster youth – has donated \$100,000 to help college-bound former foster youth. The Foundation worked with the Commission to identify 1,000 former foster youth now attending college, each of whom will receive a \$100 Burton Scholars Gift Card. The cards will be issued through Wells Fargo Bank and distributed by LA Cash for College.

"Foster youth who make it to college deserve all of the support we can provide," said Senator Burton. "They have overcome tremendous challenges to get where they are, without the emotional and financial support that students from in-tact families receive. This collaborative project is an effort to recognize their hard work and help offset some of their school expenses."

According to data from the University of California at Berkeley's Center for Social Services Research, 4,200 youth "aged-out" of California's foster care system in 2006, a



40% increase in eight years. Studies have found that these “emancipated” foster youth fare poorly as young adults, particularly in the area of education. According to a 2005 study by the University of Chicago’s Chapin Hall Center for Children, youth exiting foster care are six times less likely to enter college than the general population and 15 times less likely to actually complete their degree.

To be eligible for the Burton Scholars Gift Cards, students must be recipients of the Chafee Foster Youth Grant Program, created by the federal government in 1999 to promote higher education among former foster youth and administered in California by the Commission. According to data from the Commission, foster youth participating in the Chafee Foster Youth Grant Program have an average unmet financial need of nearly \$5,000. In California, there are more than 1,000 first-time and 1,300 returning (second-time) Chafee grant recipients in the current academic year.

The Commission, LA Cash for College and Wells Fargo Bank joined with the John Burton Foundation to make the project possible. Wells Fargo’s commitment to education is unwavering. Last year, Wells Fargo donated more than \$10.5 million to education in California alone.

The Commission’s mission is to “make education beyond high school financially accessible to all Californians.” The Commission provides grants and information for funding post-secondary education to students and parents throughout the state.

“The Burton Foundation has a strong track record of helping improve the lives of California’s homeless children and youth in foster care,” said Commission Executive Director Diana Fuentes Michel. “The California Student Aid Commission is proud to work with the foundation to help foster youth fund their college experience and we look forward to joining it in building future funding opportunities for this under-served population.”

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If you would like more information about the Burton Scholars Program or to schedule interviews with Senator Burton or former foster youth in college in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, please contact Amy Lemley at 415-693-1322 or at amy@johnburtonfoundation.org