



JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT COMMITTEE
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2024-111

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March 18, 2023

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Members
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Affordable Housing for College Students

Dear Members of the Committee,

I respectfully request the Joint Legislative Audit Committee approve an audit regarding affordable housing for college students. Thousands of college students in California are homeless or experience housing insecurity. In 2020, the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools found that 1 in 5 California Community College (CCC) students experienced homelessness. It also found that 1 in 10 California State University (CSU) students and 1 in 20 University of California (UC) students experienced homelessness. These students stay on friends' couches, in cars or shelters. They often clean up in campus sinks or locker rooms.

Housing insecurity and homelessness can impact students in many ways, including by making higher education an impossible attainment. These students experience high levels of anxiety and poorer physical health. They are more likely to have lower GPAs and less likely to complete their degrees. Often they find themselves with substantial student debt but without the increased earning potential associated with degrees. Consequently, they are more likely to struggle to repay student loans.

The UC has stated that affordable student housing is a priority. Its goal is to provide rent that is below the local market rate while providing options that meet the various needs of its student population. With the additional of 34,000 beds since the fall of 2011, UC now houses more than 113,000 students, about 38 percent of its enrollment. UCLA provides housing for 49 percent of students, while UC Berkeley provides housing for 21 percent of students. UC San Diego has made a "housing guarantee" to provide incoming students with access to two years of on-campus housing. The UC system continues to add housing, planning the addition of 22,000 student beds by the fall of 2028.

The CSU system has enough on-campus beds to house 13 percent of all students. Even more so than the UC, on-campus housing varies by campus. Fresno State University only has enough housing for 4 percent of its students, while CSU Sonoma can house 50 percent of its students. CCC traditionally does not provide on-campus housing. As of the fall of 2022, CCC provides only enough on-campus beds to house less than 0.5 percent of CCC's 2.1 million students. Only 12 of California's 116 community colleges even offer campus housing.

University-provided student housing has traditionally been self-sufficient, when it is provided. Accordingly, universities traditionally financed student housing and paid for it from collecting dorm rents and fees, without public funds. The State has—perhaps for the first time—stepped up to help the hundreds of thousands of students who are desperately in need of affordable housing. It recently made a commitment to invest \$4 billion dollars in affordable housing for students at CCC, CSU, and UC (affordable student housing program). The funds were intended to provide at least 20,000 affordable beds to college students. The rents that colleges can charge for these dorm beds will be limited to 15 percent of a county's "area median income." According to CalMatters, this would be about \$800 per month at a college in Los Angeles.

Audit Scope

Studies show that students living on campus have a higher GPA, are more likely to graduate, and are living in a cost-effective housing option. Availability of affordable housing is even more so a prerequisite for hundreds of thousands of college students who are experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. UC, CSU, CCC, and the State have rightfully turned their attention to this important issue. I am requesting this audit to bring transparency to our efforts. I am also hoping the State Auditor can identify best practices and ideas for how we can best assist students in dire need of affordable housing options. Specifically, the audit will review the following:

- To the extent information is readily available, identify the following:
 - The percentage of student housing provided by colleges and universities over the past few years.
 - The number of students at the colleges and universities over the past few years.
 - The number of additional beds that colleges and universities have provided over the past few years and anticipate providing over the next few years.
 - The amount students pay for housing provided by colleges and universities.
 - The methodology campuses use to estimate what students pay for off-campus housing, and campus information on how many of its students can afford to cover those housing costs.
- Determine what colleges and universities are doing to increase the stock of affordable housing for students, including efforts associated with the Affordable Student Housing Construction Grants (Construction Grants).
 - Review any centralized planning and leadership at CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), CSU Office of the Chancellor (CSUOC), and UC Office of the President (UCOP) regarding student housing.

- Review campus and system-wide goals regarding the provision of housing. Determine whether they are reaching their goals.
- Review oversight and guidance provided by CCCCCO, CSUOC, and UCOP.
- Perform the following audit work related to Construction Grants:
 - Review the process used in reviewing, approving, and funding grant applications. Identify factors considered in the approval process.
 - Review oversight provided by CCCCCO, CSUOC, and UCOP to ensure that projects are successfully completed.
 - Identify and assess the status of planning and construction of housing resulting from the Construction Grants.
- Determine whether the mix of housing (e.g., classic/traditional residence halls, apartments, and family housing) provided by colleges and universities makes sense relative to the student population being served.
- Review efforts by colleges and universities to assist students experiencing housing insecurity, including the provision off-campus housing vouchers, emergency on-campus housing, financial assistance, and case management. Identify any best practices that can be replicated at other campuses.
- Review the sufficiency and helpfulness of housing information provided to students and prospective students.
- Review efforts by colleges and universities to bring down housing costs, including through financial aid packages and local partnerships.

Thank you for your consideration of this audit request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff at 916-319-3300.

Sincerely,

GREGG HART, Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Assemblymember, 37th District