

Office of the President

July 24, 2020

Dear San Antonio Community,

I am writing today as a mom and someone who cares deeply about young people who have been in the foster care system, and to introduce you to another wonderful mom who is new to San Antonio, Cari Traylor. Cari recently moved to San Antonio, with her children and her husband, Jeff (UTSA's new head football coach) Cari is an educator and worked with children in the foster care system in East Texas.

I ask for your patience in reading such a long email, but I hope you see the passion Cari and I have and are inspired to join this important cause. As you read, I ask that you keep in mind all that your parents did for you, or you did in getting your child ready for going away to college the first time and in making certain they had everything they needed to be successful. Please also remember that these students do not have family to do the same for them.

While more than 70% of youth in foster care aspire to go to college, yet only 33% enroll in a two or four-year institution, and **only 3% will graduate**. Sadly, that number is even lower in Texas. Students with a history of foster care live without support, resources, and guidance that a stable family provide and are all the more likely to drop out of school, have children at an early age, experience homelessness, or be incarcerated. They are a particularly vulnerable student population with unique challenges related to unresolved trauma, instability of placement and educational preparation, and few financial and emotional supports.

I've been blessed to work with an extraordinary group of committed folks to make sure college students in Bexar County, who have been in foster care, have the specialized support they need to graduate, and to make certain that every Bexar County child in foster care is college aware, believes they can enroll in college and graduate, and has the support necessary to do so.

We approached our local delegation and, with their unwavering support, received funding from the State of Texas in the last biennium to fund the ***Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project***. The Pilot Project is a truly novel approach. The generous appropriation (\$3.5M), which we believe to be the first of its kind in the United States, funds an expansive partnership between all of the public 2 and 4-year institutions in San Antonio (UTSA, Texas A&M-SA, & The Alamo Colleges District) the Bexar County Children's Court, Family Tapestry, Child Advocates San Antonio and numerous community partners. For the first time, we are all working together to provide a truly comprehensive pipeline of support for foster youth from middle school through college.

The Pilot funds comprehensive programs located on all of our campuses that are currently supporting over 250 students with a history of foster care. **This has been particularly critical during the Covid Pandemic as our students do not have family to fall back on.**

The Pilot partnered with the Bexar County Children's Court to establish the "**College Bound Docket**," a truly unique approach and one of the first of its kind in the United States. Kids still in foster care get the help

that you would give your child in applying to and selecting a college, including assistance with enrollment and financial aid applications and visiting college campuses. The Docket also provides financial assistance for things such as books, SAT or ACT prep and testing, application fees and emergency funds. There are 37 foster youth already participating in the Docket and there are 23 on the waiting list. **22 Docket participants graduated from high school this year and all (but one) will be going to college this fall!**

The Pilot is also working to address the issue that young people with a history of foster care are overrepresented in the homeless and at risk for homelessness populations. UTSA & Texas A&M San Antonio now function as Supervised Independent Living Programs (SIL) for kids who are still in foster care and enrolled in college. The SIL students live in our dorms like any other student rather than in a foster home and the state pays for room and board.

**Thank you again for your patience in reading all of this. I thought it was important context. I hope you recalled what you needed when you moved into your first dorm or college apartment and/or all you sent your child off to college with. These young people do not have that support, and Cari and I are asking now for your help in filling the void. Help is welcomed from anyone, so please also share with your networks.**

**We need 100 Care Baskets that include items like non-perishable foods, cutlery, dishes and cookware, bed linens, towels, laundry detergent, cleaning supplies, masks, hand sanitizer, gift cards, etc. Basically, anything that you would have wanted for yourself or provided for your child.**

**This is not a prescriptive list. We ask that you think expansively and are creative in filling your basket.**

**We hope to enlist your help in providing a fully filled basket(s), as many as you are able. Please place items for one student in a laundry basket and include a personal note to them from you & your family. Please also provide your name, address, email address and phone number with the basket, so we may recognize your gift and thank you.**

**Baskets can be dropped off on the UTSA campus on August 15<sup>th</sup> between 10:00 AM and 12:00 PM at the UTSA Convocation Center. Signs will be placed on the Main Campus, One UTSA Circle, directing you to the drop-off location.**

**Social distancing measures will ensure that you drop off your basket from the safety of your vehicle. The Pilot project will distribute the care baskets to the campuses and Children's Court.**

To learn more about the Pilot visit <https://www.bcfes.org/>. I also recently did an interview with the State Comptroller's Office that provides further information and is viewable [HERE](#).

Thank you again. Together we can take care of these students as our parents did for us and as we do our own children.

Yours sincerely,

Peggy Eighmy  
First Lady  
UTSA

Cari Traylor  
UTSA Football