



June 26, 2024

Contact: DCFS Office of Public Affairs
(213) 518-6549
publicaffairs@dcfs.lacounty.gov

Youth in Foster Care Celebrated for Academic Success at Graduation Ceremony

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) honored nearly 160 college-bound youth in foster care at a graduation ceremony where family, friends and social workers celebrated their achievements.

DCFS Senior Deputy Director Cynthia McCoy-Miller welcomed an enthusiastic audience at the evening event, held at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Downtown Los Angeles on Tuesday, June 25.

“Young people in foster care must overcome unique challenges and may not always have the same level of family support or guidance like their school peers,” Senior Deputy Director McCoy-Miller said. “That’s why this day is so special because this academic feat is a first step for them to reach greater goals. We are extremely proud of them!”

The annual *Celebration* event, now in its 36th year, recognizes high school seniors in foster care with a 2.8 grade point average or above who plan to pursue higher education at colleges or universities.

Among those who offered words of inspiration to the graduating class were Comedian and Actress Tiffany Haddish, author of the new book *I Curse You with Joy*; Lindsey P. Horvath, chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors; and KTLA Morning News Co-Anchor Chris Schauble, who has proudly emceed the event for the last decade.

This year’s honorees were accepted to schools across the country including University of Utah, Louisiana State University, Clark Atlanta University, Stanford University, the University of Southern California and University of California, Berkeley.

More than \$200,000 in scholarships were awarded at the event, with each youth receiving at least \$2,000. Donors included the Los Angeles County African American Employees Association (LACAAEA), Foster Care Project, Foster Care Counts, Connecting a Caring Community, Emerson Wahl So Good Fund, and Terriel Cox Memorial Fund.

Among the graduates were Khary Burrell of Lancaster, who is expected to attend California State University, Northridge; Aleena Ortega of West Covina, who is expected to attend the University of



California, Santa Barbara; and Emily Lesage of Van Nuys and Victor Leon of Los Angeles, who are expected to attend the University of California, Los Angeles.

“Despite my adversities, I remained steadfast in my commitment to excel and contribute positively to the world around me,” said Burrell, who plans to pursue a career in marine biology.

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About the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

The Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) promotes child safety and well-being by partnering with communities to strengthen families, keeping children at home whenever possible, and connecting them with stable, loving homes in times of need. As the largest child protective services agency in the nation, DCFS is responsible for ensuring the safety of more than two million children across 88 diverse cities in Los Angeles County. Established in 1984 to keep children safe and support families in crisis, it is one of the 35 Los Angeles County Departments governed by the five-member Board of Supervisors with nearly 9,000 staff across 20 regional offices, specialized bureaus, and administration that cover a broad array of services and programs. DCFS is led by Director Brandon T. Nichols, an attorney with more than 20 years of expertise in child welfare, foster care, adoptions, and mental health. For more information, visit <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/>.