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Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Testimony of Brandi Slaughter, CEO
Voices for Ohio's Children

Proponent Testimony on HB 50

Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chair Coley, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony today in support of HB 50. My name is Brandi Slaughter and I am the CEO of Voices for Ohio's Children, a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to making Ohio the best place to be a kid. Voices advocates for policies that maximize a child's life chances by ensuring all of Ohio's 3 million children are safe, healthy, educated, connected, and employable.

I am here today to discuss the needs of a specific and very vulnerable population of Ohio's children: youth about to age out of the state's foster care system. Every year in Ohio, more than 1,000 teenagers in our child welfare system turn 18.[1] For most Ohio youth, 18 means graduation, college, career, and the promise of a bright future. These young people are free to experiment and take risks because they know they always have a stable, loving family to turn to when they fight with their roommate, run low on cash, or get the flu. Over 50 percent of them will continue to live with their families off and on through age 24 until they graduate, marry, or land that dream job.[2]

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[1] Supporting Success: Improving Higher Education Outcomes for Students from Foster Care (Version 2.0), Casey Family Programs
[2] A Rising Share of Young Adults Live in Their Parents' Home (2013), The Pew Research Center.

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For youth coming up through the foster care system, however, turning 18 means something very different. They are immediately declared legally "independent" and lose their foster care support—whether or not they have anywhere else to go. Right away, they need to find a job, an apartment, open a bank account, get health insurance, secure transportation, and learn how to file taxes. If they want to go to college, they have to navigate the application and financial aid processes without a parent's help or input. It's no wonder that they struggle. In a recent study of former foster youth at age twenty-six, 20 percent had not graduated high school, 52 percent were unemployed, 36 percent had experienced homelessness, and only 3 percent had graduated college.[3] These kids are struggling because they are just that—kids. We have known for years that the human brain is not fully developed until a person is in their mid-twenties.[4] Yet, we are asking this particular group of 18-year-olds to take on all that it means to be an adult well before they reach developmental and emotional maturity and a full 4-6 years before we have the same expectation of their family-supported peers.

House Bill 50 recognizes foster youth for the vulnerable young people they are and gives them the support they need. HB 50 will create a new package of programs to serve youth who age out of

www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/07/SDT-millennials-living-with-parents-07-2013.pdf

[3] Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

[4] The MIT Young Adult Development Project, retrieved 6/10/14 from http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/youngadult/

foster care, as well as those adopted after age 16, through their 21st birthdays. The legislation helps these youth prepare for college or a career, and assists them with housing options, including apartment, campus housing, and foster/host homes. HB 50 also taps into federal funds made available through the Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 to defray approximately two-thirds of the cost. In addition, federal payments for foster care and adoption services will be administered by the Department of Job and Family Services to cover the cost of food, clothing, shelter, school supplies, visitation travel expenses, and personal items.

The transition to adulthood is such an important time in a young person's life. It should be a time of optimism and possibility. I urge you to support HB 50 so that Ohio's foster youth can share this experience with their peers and enjoy the freedom that comes with continued stability and support.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 50. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have. I also encourage you to visit the Ohio Fostering Connections website at www.ohiofosteringconnections.org.