

**Cleveland State University**  
**Proponent Testimony regarding House Bill 164**  
The Foster-to-Education Scholarship Act  
Submitted to Ohio House Finance Committee – October 4, 2023

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee, thank you for allowing Cleveland State University the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 164, the Foster-to-Education Scholarship Act.

My name is Phillip Cockrell, PhD., and I serve as Vice President, Campus Engagement, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Cleveland State University. I am pleased, on behalf of CSU, to support this bipartisan bill, which provides scholarships for foster youth to pursue higher education and the necessary resources to support the well-being and educational success of foster youth in the state of Ohio.

We can all understand the importance of higher education and its impact on individuals and, more broadly, on the state's workforce development efforts and economic competitiveness. Benefits of attaining higher education includes higher employment rates, expanded career opportunities, increased earning potential and the best way to achieve upward social mobility.

Our foster youth face unique challenges, particularly related to pursuing higher education. This bill will provide resources and support to empower foster youth and help provide them with a strong foundation for future success, career opportunities and ultimately for a brighter future for themselves and the State of Ohio.

At Cleveland State, through generous philanthropic support, we have created the Sullivan-Deckard Scholarship Opportunity Program to provide highly motivated youth who are aging out of foster care the opportunity to pursue an undergraduate degree. CSU has also received state support, most recently \$300,000 in funding for FY24-25, approved by the Legislature, through Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to help provide tuition and wrap-around services to young adults who aged out of foster care.

We appreciate the continued support legislative leaders have provided the Sullivan-Deckard Scholars Program and believe broadening the state's support for educational attainment of foster youth, as H.B. 164 seeks to achieve, is a much-needed and worthy endeavor. The funding and support resources provided in H.B. 164, if passed, will allow Cleveland State and other institutions to expand the foster youth served by our programming and will provide state level leadership needed to emphasize the benefits for such programming and will encourage additional educational institutions to assist foster youth.

CSU's Sullivan-Deckard Program, launched in 2015 with a \$2.3 million gift from Frank and Barb Sullivan and Jennifer and Daryl Deckard, offers the benefit of a world-class education with a system of support that is customized and structured to meet the academic, social and financial needs of students. Since inception, the program has provided more than 40 scholarships and educational opportunities to foster youth.

Scholars receive professional guidance, educational support and peer mentoring as important components of the program's success. The objective is to help students make a smooth transition to independent living, complete engaged learning for personal and professional development and earn a Bachelor's Degree. Currently, the program offers a four-year scholarship and provides awardees funding for tuition, books, fees and year-round campus housing. Students have access to academic advising, on-campus employment, professional mentoring and career services. Similar to the proposed bill under consideration, the Sullivan-Deckard award is a needs-based scholarship applied after all other funding sources have been exhausted.

CSU programs have encouraged our Sullivan-Deckard students to pursue sustained and growing employment areas. Our current partnerships will provide industry certifications in collaboration with academic affairs to support workforce development programs across the region so that our graduates are prepared for in-demand jobs throughout the region.

We are committed to continuing this effort and addressing the challenges faced by emancipated youth and all CSU students touched by foster care. I feel strongly that further commitment from the legislature will enhance the work already underway at CSU and other institutions of higher education and will greatly expand opportunities for foster youth in the Greater Cleveland region and across the state.

I would like to thank the sponsors of H.B. 164 for their leadership on this important issue and for their commitment to the future success of Ohio's foster youth. We are pleased to support passage of H.B. 164, encourage members of the Ohio Legislature to support this initiative and are interested in continuing to provide our support now and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Cleveland State University's perspective on this important legislation.