

House Finance Committee

HB 164 – Proponent Testimony

October 4, 2023

Chauna Mason, Foster Care Advocate

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LeRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 164.

I am here today to testify in support of this bill to provide scholarships. My name is Chauna Mason. I am a first-generation college graduate. I am from a small town where people often underestimated my potential because of the social standing and make up of my family. I am passionate about the issue of providing young people who have experienced foster care because I believe in the power of education to open doors. Ohio trails the nation in outcomes for youth in terms of post-secondary education. In 2021, only 12% of youth with experience in foster care in Ohio were enrolled in post-secondary education. The national average is twice that, though still only 24%. This is according to Annie E. Casey Foundation's Fostering Youth Transitions 2023.

While I have not experienced foster care, I have faced challenges like those who have. Not being able to participate in extracurricular activities because you cannot afford them. Not having the resources to take SAT and ACT prep sessions. Not being sure you will be able to afford to take these tests. Moving so often that it is hard to build close enough relationships with faculty for them to write a compelling letter of recommendation. I also know what it feels like to not want to be a burden on others. Not wanting to ask for money that I knew was scarce. Not wanting to bring up activities because if my mom did say yes, how was I going to get there or who was going to watch my siblings.

If not for the passion of individuals who believed in Trio Programs, an educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, I can confidently say I would not be standing here before you. What the Trio Program did for me is what HB 164 Foster-to-College Scholarship Act will do for the young people who have experienced foster care. And as someone who has benefitted from a government funded program it is my responsible to reach back and bring others along.

HB 164 Foster-to-College Scholarship Act will provide these young people with the support and resources to allow them to consider college as an option. These young people deserve be able to have the college experience. They deserve to be exposed to and prepared mentally for college. They deserve to have someone hold their hand through the process as they navigate the applications, financial aid packages, and acceptance letters. They also deserve the resources necessary to keep them in school. Getting them into college is not enough. Young people who have experienced foster care are just as much part of our future as their peers who haven't. All these young people are the future of our country. When they succeed, we all succeed.