

House Finance Committee

HB 164 – Proponent Testimony
October 4, 2023

Tekisha Boone, Licensed Foster caregiver and 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.

My name is Tekisha Boone and if not for my maternal grandparents I would have been affected by the foster care system. I was raised by my maternal grandparents for the 1st- 8 years of my life. Looking back at my childhood, my Mom and Dad were married at 19 – and divorced 4 years later. My Dad went to the Army and my mom moved back home with my grandparents. My grandmother was a social worker and my grandfather was the Pastor of our family church. They were not wealthy, but I never knew it. They lived on a budget and they made it work. By the time I turned 18 and it was my time to attend college, I had such a high level of support and network – I didn't realize I couldn't afford college. Thanks to everyone that supported me, I graduated with my BA & with only \$20K in student loan debt.

Now, as a mom of 2, strong independent smart girls – and a director of sales and marketing for my company, I cannot afford college tuition for my oldest daughter – Anisha - despite saving for nearly her entire childhood. Together my husband and we make too much annually to get enough financial aid and her grades are not strong enough to qualify for academic scholarships. I never thought in all my years that I'd be in this situation. I mean – I went to college – because I was poor – and now that we are in the middle income tax bracket, we cannot afford to send our daughter to her college choice. For the past 2 years my husband and I have scraped and saved to pay \$50K per year for our oldest daughter to attend university and we are still struggling to pay. We had to hire a college counselor to help her with applying to universities, with common app and with essays about her dreams for a college education.

I cannot imagine a child emancipating from the foster system and trying to take on this journey alone. My child was overwhelmed so much so that we needed extra support. Once she started at university, she also needed extra mentoring and support from our counselors to ensure she would be successful in pursuing her education.

During the COVID pandemic, my husband and I realized that school was also a safe place for so many children. They knew they would be fed and safe with their teachers. We decided to take classes to become certified as Foster Care parents - thinking that we could make a difference for other children especially the older ones that were on the verge of independence. I know that without the people who came to support me along this college journey that I would not have had such success. And now I think its important that we give back to make our communities stronger, which means ensuring education is available and affordable for these children that are at such a great disadvantage for no fault of their own. They deserve opportunity and education.

Education is so important – not just for understanding but also for the routine and the work ethic that it teaches – not to mention the confidence that comes with be self-reliant. By passing HB164 to offer scholarships to students in foster care, we are giving these children hope that they can change their life and not be stuck in a system that limits their potential life's success.

Thank you for considering this bill and voting to support it.