

House Finance Committee

HB 164 – Proponent Testimony
October 4, 2023

Kurt Holden, Foster Care Advocate/ Speaker/ LE Executive

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 Kurt Holden and I am the Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police at Wright State University. I wanted to provide testimony today on HB164, because this is an extremely important initiative that will require leaders in your position to support those impacted by foster care to have a greater opportunity of success in college.

You may be asking; Why is this important to me? Why am I here today? Why is a Chief of Police in front of me? My response is simple, I grew up in foster care.

My (3) brothers and I were placed in foster care due to my mother and father struggling with addictions related to heavy drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, and physical and emotional abuse. I was in foster care from the age of 2 until I graduated high school at 17.

During my time in care, and moving around in different foster homes, I was separated from my brothers. Much of that time, I struggled and wrestled with where I could go in life and who I could become in life.

Only 2-3% of foster youth ever achieve a college degree. Most foster youth know this statistic and many shy away from attending college, because of the little to no chance of seeing a successful outcome and the lack of resources to offset barriers.

Without a clear path in life, access to resources or opportunity, 1 in 4 youth impacted by foster care will experience homelessness at some point in their life. Currently, approximately 50% of our homelessness population spent time in foster care.

I was one of those individuals that faced homelessness. I also faced food scarcity, lack of access and guidance, and job placement. So, I enrolled into college.

Sadly, my reasons were not to be a college graduate, because I knew the statistics and chances of success were nearly impossible. I needed to no longer sleep on a buddy's couch or spend another cold night with nothing but a concrete pillow. So, I did what anyone does who is trying to be successful and I attended college. To this day, I can say doing so, saved my life.

However, due to the fact of having no resources, dealing with many barriers, including food scarcity, I obviously flunked out. I flunked out because I was unable to attend classes because I had to work multiple jobs. I worked multiple jobs to ensure that I could save money so that me and my younger brother could get an apartment together when he left care.

After I left college and got an apartment with my brother, we had stability, security, and hope. I now had a place to call home, food, and a sense of safety.

Once I had that foundation, I re-enrolled into college for the right reasons. I no longer was flunking, I was succeeding. I have earned both, my Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Wright State University. I graduated Grad School with a 3.4 GPA.

This education led me on a path of opportunity and success. I have been a police officer and have graciously and honorably served my community. I have been promoted through the rank of Sergeant, Lieutenant, was a K9 officer, and have awards from the department, community, and the state. When Gov. DeWine was the Attorney General, I was awarded the Mark Losey Distinguished Law Enforcement award.

I say that not to brag, but to tell you about the potential students foster youth have. As a foster youth, I faced homelessness, flunked out of college, and faced many obstacles and ran into many barriers that were outside of my control, because of things that happened to me as a child that were outside of my control. And, with some luck and by the grace of God, I did it, but the deck was stacked against me.

With your help we can make college more obtainable, accessible, and success more realistic, by removing the luck and making it a more realistic option, and more achievable than 2-3%.

This is important to me because my brothers and sisters in care still struggle with accessibility and resources to be successful in college. I am here today, because I know the importance of earning a college degree and the opportunities it affords someone in life.

Without college, without a degree, without a little bit of luck, I do not know if there would be a Chief Holden in front of you all today.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.