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**Representative Dontavius L. Jarrells**  
**Assistant Minority Leader**  
**Ohio House District 1**

Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 164, "The Foster-to-College Scholarship Act." This bipartisan legislation is crucial for Ohio to support foster youth in their pursuit of higher education, aligning us with 35 other states that already offer similar scholarships.

During testimony from Kurt Holden, Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police at Wright State University, I was inspired by his success story of rising from the foster care system to his current position. Unfortunately, Chief Holden's experience is not the norm. Ohio currently lags behind the nation in outcomes for foster youth, with lower high school graduation rates, reduced employment opportunities, increased justice system involvement, and limited access to education compared to their peers nationwide.

By implementing this bill, we can change these statistics and provide foster children with the means to pay for college. The legislation has been carefully refined in collaboration with higher education stakeholders, ensuring that the state covers necessary costs after other grants and scholarships have been utilized. The estimated annual cost of \$7.5 million is a small fraction of our overall scholarship spending and an investment worth making.

In Ohio specifically, the transformative power of higher education is evident. College graduates in our state earn nearly double the income of their high school-educated peers, showcasing the immense economic benefits that come with obtaining a degree. Furthermore, Ohioans with a college education experience higher employment rates, contributing to a stronger workforce and a thriving economy.

When we consider the intergenerational impact of higher education, the importance of this bill becomes even more pronounced. Numerous studies have demonstrated that children whose parents attended college are significantly more likely to pursue and successfully complete their own higher education. By supporting foster youth in their journey towards college, we can empower them to break the cycle of limited opportunities and create a brighter future not only for themselves but for generations to come in our great state of Ohio.

In closing, I will leave you with the words of Columbus State Community College student Caidyn Bearfield, herself a former foster youth. "Offering full-ride scholarships to students with

experience in foster care will create a strong foundation so they are not dependent upon assistance programs for the rest of their life. Full-ride scholarships would be a life-affirming preventative measure to equip today's foster youth to defy the statistical trends we have seen for so many decades and break the cycle."

Thank you for considering the importance of "The Foster-to-College Scholarship Act." Its passage will help Ohio's foster youth overcome barriers, achieve their educational aspirations, and build successful lives.

