



Melody Tankersley, PhD

Senior Vice President and Provost

House Bill 164
Proponent Testimony
Melody Tankersley, Provost
Kent State University

Chairman Young and members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony on behalf of Kent State University in support of House Bill 164. Kent State, as part of our mission and commitment to access, has invested in our foster youth population and we can see firsthand how important the components of House Bill 164 will be for changing the lives of Ohio's foster youth.

Kent State's First Star Academy partners with child welfare agencies and other community partners to provide an immersive, specialized academic, college preparatory and opioid drug awareness education and mentorship program for middle and high school youth impacted by the foster care system. Modeled after the national First Star approach (*firststar.org*), the goal is to offer youth in the foster care system a pathway to postsecondary education, employment opportunities and/or military enlistment. *Over 98% (compared to 50% of other foster youth) of academy students nationwide graduate from high school and over 90% (compared to 20% of other foster youth) of previous participants have enrolled in higher education programs.*

Our Academy recruits middle and high school scholars, between 7th -10th grades, from northeast Ohio. The First Star Kent State Academy provides a variety of year-round active learning opportunities that includes life skills, mental wellness, academic support, career exploration, social and cultural activities, field trips, service learning and recreational activities. We offer a 4-week summer experience, including a residential component where students live on the Kent State Kent campus. This component offers students' academic support, enrichment and the encouragement needed to excel during the upcoming academic year and in the transition to young adulthood, while providing exposure to the college experience.

The First Star Kent State Academy launched as the result of an award from the OhioCorps pilot program in 2019 to serve students that were impacted by the opioid crisis. The work of the Academy continues with support from the state through the Ohio Rural Universities funding line in the state's budget bill. We are deeply grateful to the General Assembly for their support of this important work. The successes realized already indicate that this level of programming has a positive effect on students impacted by the foster care system.

House Bill 164 would be a gamechanger for Ohio's foster care youth that seek to pursue postsecondary education. We have seen firsthand the immense challenges foster youth that transition to postsecondary education experience and the trials experienced due to navigating multiple systems just to be able to access basic needs, as well as housing, food and social supports. House Bill 164 would provide guidance, pathways and resources to ease these challenges and position our foster youth students for their best chance at success upon entering postsecondary education in Ohio. Kent State University is happy to

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support House Bill 164, and we urge its passage. Thank you for your consideration of this thoughtful and impactful bill. Please contact me through our office of Government and Community Relations if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melody Tankersley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Melody Tankersley, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President and Provost
Kent State University