



Office of the President

Cleveland State University
Proponent Testimony regarding House Bill 164
The Foster-to-Education Scholarship Act
Submitted to Ohio House Higher Education Committee – June 7, 2023

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller and members of the Ohio House of Representatives Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing Cleveland State University the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 164, the Foster-to-Education Scholarship Act.

My name is Phillip Cockrell, PhD., and I serve as Vice President, Campus Engagement, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Cleveland State University. I am pleased, on behalf of Cleveland State, to support this bipartisan bill, which provides scholarships for foster youth to pursue higher education and the necessary resources to support their well-being and educational success in the state of Ohio. We appreciate the continued support legislative leaders have provided to broaden the state's support for educational attainment of foster youth, as H.B. 164 seeks to achieve. This is a much needed and worthy endeavor.

We can all understand the importance of higher education and its impact on individuals and, more broadly, on the state's workforce development efforts and economic competitiveness. Benefits of attaining higher education includes higher employment rates, expanded career opportunities, increased earning potential and the best way to achieve upward social mobility. It is an important cultural milestone that we have implemented support programs for this population and increased the awareness of their experiences in the foster care system.

Our foster youth face unique challenges, particularly related to pursuing higher education. This bill will provide resources and support to empower them and help provide a strong foundation for future success, career opportunities and ultimately for a brighter future for themselves and the State of Ohio. Creating an established state-wide resource for this student population on campuses and in education settings is a research-based best practice that will simplify access for students and practitioners, support agencies, and community-based resources.

Cleveland State's Sullivan-Deckard Scholarship Opportunity Program (SDSOP), launched in 2015 with a \$2.3 million gift from Frank and Barb Sullivan and Jennifer and Daryl Deckard, offers the benefit of a world-class education with a system of support that is customized and structured to meet the academic, social and financial needs of students. Since inception, the program has provided more than 40 scholarships and educational opportunities to foster youth.

Scholars receive professional guidance, educational support and peer mentoring as important components of the program's success. The objective is to help students make a smooth transition to independent living, complete engaged learning for personal and professional development and earn a bachelor's degree. Currently, the program offers a four-year scholarship and provides awardees funding for tuition, books, fees and year-round campus housing. Students have access to academic advising, on-campus employment, professional mentoring and career services. Like the proposed bill under consideration, the Sullivan-Deckard award is a needs-based scholarship applied after all other funding sources have been exhausted.

Cleveland State offers additional support services for students with lived foster-care experience as part of the Pratt Fostering Success & Leadership Center's programming. Students participating in these programs are pursuing a range of degrees, from doctoral degrees to continuing education professional certifications.

We know that, without these support programs, many if not all these students would otherwise not pursue a college degree. The financial assistance and additional guidance are the encouragement these students need to enroll and envision themselves as college graduates. Without the resources to provide scholarships for four full years, a period in which many students can complete a degree or earn most of the credits needed toward a degree, we know that these students would be deterred to finish their degrees once any funding had lapsed and that they are highly unlikely re-enroll at a later date.

Cleveland State programs have encouraged foster-youth students to pursue sustained and growing employment areas. Our current partnerships will provide industry certifications in collaboration with academic affairs to support workforce development programs across the region so that our graduates are prepared for in-demand jobs throughout the region.

Cleveland State received \$290,000 in funding in FY20-21, approved by the Legislature through Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, to help provide tuition and wrap-around services to young adults who aged out of foster care.

We appreciate the continued support legislative leaders have provided the Sullivan-Deckard Scholars Program and believe broadening the state's support for educational attainment of foster youth, as H.B. 164 seeks to achieve, is a much-needed and worthy endeavor. The funding and support resources provided in H.B. 164, if passed, will allow Cleveland State and other institutions to expand the foster youth served by our programming and will provide state-level leadership needed to emphasize the benefits for such programming and will encourage additional educational institutions to assist foster youth.

We are committed to continuing this effort and addressing the challenges faced by emancipated youth and all Cleveland State students touched by foster care. I feel strongly that further commitment from the legislature will enhance the work already underway at Cleveland State and other institutions of higher education and will greatly expand opportunities for foster youth in the Greater Cleveland region and across the state.

I would like to thank the sponsors of H.B. 164 for their leadership on this important issue and for their commitment to the future success of Ohio's foster youth. We are pleased to support passage of H.B. 164, encourage members of the Ohio Legislature to support this initiative and are interested in continuing to provide our support now and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Cleveland State University's perspective on this important legislation.