



House Higher Education Committee

HB 164- Foster-to-College Scholarship Act
Proponent Testimony
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Chairman Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee, my name is Kelly Vyzral, and I am senior health policy associate for Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent on HB 164-Foster –to-College Scholarship Act.

The Children's Defense Fund has been the independent voice for children in Ohio for over 40 years. It is our mission to protect children from abuse and neglect, lift them out of poverty, and make sure they have access to quality education, healthcare, and nutrition. We understand that every child contributes to the vibrancy and success of our communities, and we are driven to make sure every child and young person has opportunities to gain the social economic, cultural and political capital they need to flourish into adulthood and give back to their communities.

Children with experience in foster care often face the biggest barriers to postsecondary education. No young person's dreams and future aspirations should be deferred due to challenges created by poverty, abuse, and neglect. These students require additional support to even consider college as an option, and ensuring every young person has options to pursue their career goals is not only morally just, but in the best interest of our state's future prosperity.

Sadly, Ohio trails the nation in outcomes for teens who were in foster care- according to national data, Ohio youths with experience in foster care were less likely to graduate high school or get a GED, obtain employment, or be enrolled in postsecondary school or training. They are more likely to be justice-system involved than their peers across the nation. Ohio is in the bottom 10% of states across each of these measures. Scholarships for youth with experience in care can address these negative trajectories by giving students hope and footing for a fulfilling future. Research shows that students who know they can access funding for college are more likely to aspire to attend. Aspiring to attend college also motivates students to stay in school and keep their grades up.



Over 35 other states already offer scholarships to students with experience in foster care. Texas has had tuition waivers since 2015, and evidence gathered since the establishment of this program shows that reducing financial barriers increases the likelihood that a student will complete their degree. A recent study shows that students who take advantage of Texas's policy of waiving tuition and fees are 3.5 times more likely than their peers to graduate with a postsecondary degree. Imagine how much Ohio could benefit from helping more students in our state access opportunities to obtain the skills necessary for the 21st century workforce given the growth and partnership with businesses that have come to Ohio over the past several years.

I urge you to support HB164 which would offer these "last dollar" scholarships to children with experience in foster care after the age of 14. This will help knit together the patchwork of financial aid available to students from federal, state, and private sources.

This policy can have a multi-generational impact on families and is a fiscally responsible investment in the future of Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation. I'm happy to answer any questions the committee might have.