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3rd Senate District
May 21, 2024

Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 182: The Foster-to-College Scholarship Act

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 182.

The Foster-to-College Scholarship Act aims to create a stable pathway for foster youth in Ohio to attend college by establishing a dedicated scholarship program for those who were in foster care after their 13th birthday. This bill addresses a critical need, as foster youth face unique challenges compared to their peers, often lacking the parental support and guidance necessary to navigate the complexities of higher education.

Challenges Faced by Foster Youth:

Students with foster care experience frequently encounter significant hurdles, including lower high school graduation rates, higher incidences of homelessness, and greater involvement with the justice system. National data shows that Ohio's foster youth lag behind their peers in these areas, placing our state in the bottom 10% nationwide for foster care outcomes. By providing scholarships, we can offer these students a vital opportunity to pursue higher education and improve their life trajectories.

Key Provisions of the Bill:

1. Foster-to-College Scholarship Program:

- **Eligibility:**
 - Ohio residents who have been in foster care or non certified kinship care after their 13th birthday.
 - Must be accepted for enrollment at an Ohio institution of higher education.

- **Scholarship Amount:**

- Covers the cost of attendance after deducting federal and state grants, private scholarships, and other financial aid.

- Funds are paid directly to the participating institution.

- Application Requirements:

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

- Apply for a Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) grant if eligible.

- Enroll in courses leading to a degree, credential, or certificate.

- Maintain satisfactory academic progress.

- Administration:

- The Chancellor of Higher Education will manage the approval and distribution of scholarships.

- Four full-time foster care student navigators will be employed to assist with applications and enrollment.

2. School Foster Care Liaison:

- Role and Responsibilities:

- Ensure foster students remain in their school of origin when possible.

- Coordinate with child placement agencies for appropriate school placements and transitions.

- Provide necessary transportation and services.

- Inform students about the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program.

-Funding

- The Department of Education and Workforce will hire a full-time liaison, subject to available funds.

Appropriations and Financial Impact:

The bill allocates \$7.5 million annually for the scholarship program for fiscal years 2024 and 2025. Additionally, \$15 million will be transferred from the General Revenue Fund to establish the Foster-to-College Scholarship Fund. This investment represents a small fraction of our overall scholarship spending but promises substantial returns by helping foster youth achieve academic and career success.

Why This Legislation Matters:

College graduates in Ohio earn nearly double the income of their high school-educated peers and enjoy higher employment rates. By supporting foster youth in their pursuit of higher education, we not only empower them to break the cycle of limited opportunity but also contribute to building a strong workforce and a thriving economy. The intergenerational impact of higher education further underscores the importance of this bill, as children of college graduates are more likely to pursue and complete their own higher education.

Conclusion:

Senate Bill 182 is a crucial step in supporting Ohio's foster youth, offering them the resources and guidance needed to succeed in higher education. By passing this legislation, we join over 35 states in providing scholarships to foster students, ensuring they have the opportunity to build successful futures. I urge you to support this bill and help Ohio become a great place for foster youth to achieve their educational aspirations.

Thank you for considering the importance of the Foster-to-College Scholarship Act. Its passage will help foster youth overcome barriers, achieve their educational goals, and build successful futures for generations to come.

I welcome any questions from the committee at this time.