

Senate Finance Committee
SB 182 – Establish Foster-to-College Scholarship Program
Proponent Testimony
Kim Eckhart, Volunteer, ACTION Ohio
June 25, 2024

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino , Ranking Member Sykes, and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Kim Eckhart and I am an ally of students and alumni of foster care. My heroes are the women in Ohio's history who have fought to make this state one that they could be proud to call home. I am currently writing a book about Frances Dana Barker Gage, born in Marietta in 1806 when this state was in its infancy. As part of the abolitionist and early women's rights movement, she petitioned the Constitutional Convention in 1850 for women and people of color to have the right to vote. It is people who tirelessly work on behalf of others that I admire most. I am standing in their footsteps today, because I believe that each of us has the ability to alter the course of history.

One woman who altered the course of my personal history is my mother. My mom emancipated from foster care in Connecticut in 1968 and the state provided a scholarship for her to attend Marietta College here in Ohio. I also attended Marietta College because they offered me a scholarship as the daughter of an alum. Today, 56 years after my mom received her scholarship, I am asking you to alter the course of history for the young people of Ohio. My own story makes clear this type of investment can have lasting impacts on future generations.

I encourage you to pass SB182 to provide for the full cost of attendance for students who have been in foster care. This is not as costly as it sounds, because there is already a patchwork of aid available to students from federal, state, and private sources. This bill knits together the current patchwork so that students don't have to navigate complex financial aid processes on their own. Your colleagues in the House recognize the importance of this legislation and passed its companion, HB164 on June 12th by a vote of 84 to 3 on June 12. It now has 58 cosponsors. We have the opportunity at this moment to create a lasting change. Budget bills are unwieldy and the future is always uncertain. I hope you will consider letting this bill move independently and quickly through this process.

This policy can have a multi-generational impact, as I have personally experienced. It is a fiscally responsible investment in the future of Ohio. I encourage you to make a commitment to support all students to achieve their highest potential. I would also like to offer to read the testimony provided by a young person who recently emancipated from foster care. I appreciate having the opportunity to provide testimony today and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have. Thank you.