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Senate Finance Committee
November 12, 2024

Adoption Network Cleveland's Proponent Testimony on SB 182

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 182. I am the Executive Director of Adoption Network Cleveland and I would like to offer proponent testimony for SB 182, legislation sponsored by Senator Michele Reynolds that aims to create a pathway for former foster youth in Ohio to attend post-secondary education through the Foster-to-College Scholarship Act.

Adoption Network Cleveland: The Ohio Family Connection is a forward-thinking nonprofit dedicated to meeting essential needs for information, advocacy, education, and support within the adoption community. Serving adoptees, birth parents, adoptive, kinship, and foster families, as well as youth currently or formerly in foster care, siblings, and related professionals, we provide programs and resources that make a difference. Our innovative programs are designed to empower and support these individuals, filling gaps that might otherwise go unmet.

Senate Bill 182 would make college and job training scholarships available to youth currently in or aging out of foster care, as well as to those who were in foster care at any point after their 13th birthday.

We support this bill wholeheartedly. First and foremost, it's the right thing to do for young people who have had Ohio's child welfare system act as their custodian, stepping in to fill the role of a parent. By taking on this responsibility, the state has a duty to provide not only for their well-being but also to set the foundation for their success. Ensuring access to education and workforce readiness is a critical part of that commitment, giving these youth the tools they need for a stable and successful adult life.

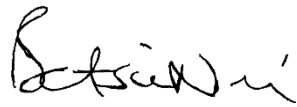
We commend the bill's approach, which removes barriers for youth who find permanency through adoption during their teen years. No young person should have to choose between a permanent family and access to higher education. Families who adopt teens typically haven't had the same time to save for college that other families might. SB 182 is designed to allow these youth to have both the support of a permanent family and the financial resources for

post-secondary education or vocational training. This provision reflects a compassionate and pragmatic solution.

Furthermore, it is in Ohio's best interest to invest in these young people. Supporting them in pursuing higher education or job training not only empowers them to thrive but also helps them become productive, contributing members of society—an investment that promises to yield long-term savings in public costs.

SB 182 represents a meaningful investment in the futures of these young people and in the future of Ohio itself. We appreciate your consideration and thank you for your continued dedication to Ohio's children. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betsie Norris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Betsie Norris
Executive Director
Adoption Network Cleveland