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House Children and Human Services Committee
March 5, 2025

**Adoption Network Cleveland's Proponent Testimony on the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program,
and Possible Inclusion in House Bill 96**

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding the vital importance of establishing the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program.

In the 135th General Assembly, House Bill 164 passed overwhelmingly in the Ohio House of Representatives. Its companion bill, Senate Bill 182, did not pass before the end of the year. Both bills have been reintroduced and are now House Bill 25 and Senate Bill 13.

We are in full support of this legislation and would like to see this woven into the Ohio Budget, House Bill 96.

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.

House Bill 25 and Senate Bill 13 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 these bills 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, we feel 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.

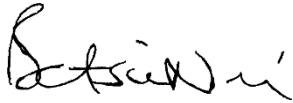
We commend the legislation's approach, which removes barriers for youth who find permanency through adoption during their teen years. No young person should have to choose between a permanent family and access to higher education. Families who adopt teens typically haven't had the same time to save for college that other families might. House Bill 25 and Senate Bill 13 are 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.

House Bill 25 and Senate Bill 13 represent a meaningful investment in the futures of these young people and in the future of Ohio itself. We appreciate your consideration and truly hope this can be included in the pending Ohio Budget. 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 stylized "N".

Betsie Norris
Executive Director
Adoption Network Cleveland