



House Children and Human Services Committee

HB 96 – Interested Party Testimony

March 5, 2025

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 pending Ohio budget.

My name is Michael Outrich. I am a foster care alumni member of Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now (ACTION Ohio), and a former member of the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB).

I am here to **support a budget amendment being made by Representative Ray to add the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program to the Ohio state budget.** This provision was highly favored in the House during Ohio's 135th General Assembly, with 58 co-sponsors, including five members of this committee. House Bill 184 passing with 84 in favor and only three against.

It has been my honor as a former foster youth to establish the Ohio Reach Scholars program at Ohio University which supports students with a history of out-of-home placement, including foster care, kinship care and adoption. Both my personal experiences and that of my peers I assisted through their undergraduate studies informs my perspective on this bill.

While I was living in a group home and attending high school, I always aspired to attend college. I had no understanding of scholarships, or what the financial costs of college might be... I just knew that if I wanted to become an urban planner, it required at least a four-year bachelor's degree.

Establishing a full-time School Foster Care Liaison within the Ohio Department of Education is an excellent step forward. This position will play an integral role in developing and sharing standardized training and expectations. Their leadership can help to ensure that individuals designated on paper as ESSA Liaisons truly are knowledgeable about foster-care-related resources and have the time and capacity to properly assist foster care youth.

Likewise, creating a Foster Youth to College Scholarship Program to support the post-secondary success of students with a foster care history whether they choose college or a trade school, will create a ripple effect of improved outcomes, leading to college retention, improved earnings and greater tax revenue.

When I was accepted by Ohio University, a caseworker drove me down to drop me off and say his final goodbyes. He said, “Now begins the next chapter of your life – make the most of it.” And then he left. I wasn’t sure what to do next. I had my class syllabus, my clothes in trash bags, and my schedule, and that was pretty much it. No guidance or support.

In that moment, for me, as with so many other students with a foster care history, I felt incredibly alone. There was so much I didn’t know. If a Foster Care Liaison had existed within the Ohio Department of Education at that time, I could have been informed about resources to support my college success. I could have avoided unnecessary debt due to taking out loans to cover the unmet costs of my tuition.

I was able to attain a Master’s degree in Urban Planning from The Ohio State University and a Bachelor’s degree in Geographic Science from Ohio University. I charted my course, without navigational support. My journey included struggles and sacrifices.

There are unique struggles that are faced by former foster youth pursuing higher education. For example, while pursuing my degrees, I did not have an established credit history or cosigner to sign a lease. The only way I could obtain an apartment was if I paid the full years’ worth of rent up front in full. I lived on a shoestring budget, skipping meals, hand washing my clothes and focusing only on work and school.

I wouldn’t wish that life on anyone, especially former foster youth who have limited resources and childhood trauma already. This is particularly relevant because I am a recently licensed foster parent who seeks to assist teens in foster care find permanency and prepare them for adulthood. I want their path to post-secondary success – whether it be college or vocational school – to be less rocky and difficult than the road that I experienced.

If the Foster Youth to College Scholarship Provision is included in the state budget, it will provide **“last dollar” support after grants and scholarships had been applied.** It will increase the likelihood of graduation and employment of Ohio foster youth and lessen the need for social and emergency support services.

I appreciate having the opportunity to provide testimony today. Thank you for your time,

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